

London Borough of Hackney  
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2016/17  
Wednesday, 19th February, 2020

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

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**Chair:** Councillor Sharon Patrick



**Councillors in Attendance:** Cllr Sade Etti (Vice-Chair), Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone, Cllr Penny Wrout and Cllr Anna Lynch

**Apologies:**

**Officers In Attendance:** Kay Brown (Director Customer Services), Marcia Facey (Operations Manager, Benefits and Housing Needs), James Goddard (Director, Regeneration) and Jennifer Wynter (Head of Benefits and Housing Needs)

**Other People in Attendance:** Elaine Ambrose (Business Development Manager, L&Q), Chyrel Brown (Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group), John Cockerham (Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership), Conan Farningham (Head of Land and Planning, Sanctuary), Ashling Fox (Chief Operating Officer, Peabody), Dawn Harrisson (Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA), George Kirby (Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody), Rob Marcantoni (Commercial & Property Director, One Housing Group), Councillor Sem Moema (Mayoral Adviser Private Renting and Housing Affordability), Sam Osborne (Regional Lettings Manager, L&Q), Olukunle Olujide (Director of Development, ISHA), Councillor Rebecca Rennison (Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply), Alistair Smyth (Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership), Kimberley De Vergori (Head of Housing, Sanctuary), Alexandra Willey (Director of Strategic Asset Management, Clarion Housing Group) and Catherine Kyne (Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group)

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Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

1.1 There were no apologies.

## **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 Cllr Lynch declared she was a Housing Association tenant.

## **4 Evidence gathering for review - Housing Associations' work with the Council to best meet housing need in Hackney**

4.1 The Chair welcomed the guests below who were in attendance for this item:

- Cllr Rebecca Rennison, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply
- Cllr Sem Moema, Mayoral Advisor, Private Renting and Housing Affordability
- Kay Brown, Director of Customer Services
- Jennifer Wynter, Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
- James Goddard, Interim Director, Regeneration
- Marcia Facey, Operations Manager, Benefits and Housing Needs
  
- Catherine Kyne, Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group
- Alexandra Willey, Director of Strategic Asset Management, Clarion Housing Group
- Iain Taylor, Partnerships Director, Clarion Housing Group
- John Cockerham, Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership
- Alistair Smyth, Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership
- Dawn Harrison, Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA
- Olukunle Olujide, Director of Development, ISHA
- Elaine Ambrose, Business Development Manager, L&Q
- Sam Osborne, Regional Lettings Manager, L&Q
- Chyrel Brown, Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group
- Rob Marcantoni, Commercial & Property Director, One Housing Group
- Ashling Fox, Chief Operating Officer, Peabody
- George Kirby – Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody
- Kimberley De Vergori, Head of Housing, Sanctuary
- Conan Farningham, Head of Land and Planning, Sanctuary

4.2 She advised that this item and the next would form part of the Commission's evidence gathering in its review around housing associations, and the partnership work between them and the Council.

4.3 This first item would look at how the Council and housing associations worked together to meet housing need in the borough, including how they ensured that

those in most need of housing were able to take up tenancies and sustain them for the longer term.

- 4.4 The Commission was aware that there were agreements to allow the Council to nominate households from its housing waiting list for shares of housing association properties becoming available or vacant. This item would seek to explore how these arrangements worked, and any challenges.
- 4.5 She thanked guests for having provided papers. She asked that it started with guests from the Council making any opening comments around their paper.
- 4.6 Following that, she would invite questions for Officers focused on the effectiveness of the Council's practices around nominations.
- 4.7 She would then ask representatives of housing associations to make any opening comments before seeking to hold a separate question and answer sessions on their work and approaches.
- 4.8 Thanking the Chair, the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs made the following substantive points:
  - Hackney was in the midst of a housing crisis. The numbers of households on the Council's housing register were at a historic high of over 13,300, and the numbers of Hackney households living in temporary accommodation the highest for a decade.
  - Demand for social housing was far outweighing supply. In addition, greater shares of those households approaching the Council for help and support, had complex needs. These could include mental and physical ill health conditions, caring for disabled children, and drug and alcohol dependency.
  - Nomination agreements between councils and housing associations were intended to ensure that all affordable housing providers played a role in best enabling those in most housing need to secure social housing. The agreement in place was one which had been developed on a sub-regional basis by this Council and the other East London Housing Authorities, in consultation with a housing association representative.
  - The operation of the nominations agreement took place in a context of generally good relationships between staff in the Council's lettings team and at housing associations.
  - There had been falls in the numbers of new lettings made available to the Council to allocate to households on its register. This was the case for both council and housing association stock.
  - However, there were concerns that the numbers of lettings made available to the Council by Housing associations were falling the fastest. Another concern was statistics suggesting the Council may not be receiving the total numbers of nominations from housing associations which it should.
  - Lettings allocated to the Council by housing associations had fallen by 45% between 2016 and 2019.

- Combined, housing associations managed similar total stock numbers in Hackney as the Council. However, over the period 2016 to 2019, housing associations had made 331 lettings available to the Council to nominate on, compared to the 801 lettings delivered through council stock. Whilst differences were to be expected given that nominations agreements allowed for the Council to receive a share of housing association lets rather than all of them, this did not fully explain this large difference. The Council was keen to work with housing associations to explore this further.
- A number of providers had moved away from the use of affordability checks. Previously, more households being nominated by the Council had been rejected by housing associations on the grounds of affordability. This was despite the Council having assessed a unit as being affordable to the household, prior to the nomination being made. This change was welcome, and she would encourage all housing associations to do the same.
- There was sometimes an issue around units being given over to the Council to nominate on which were apparently ready to let, later being found to require major works. This could delay the lettings process by a number of months, and bring distress to households who had been preparing to take up the unit.
- The Council had been working to encourage a greater focus by housing associations on homelessness prevention, and on supporting households to work through any complex issues which might be threatening their ability to sustain a tenancy, rather than moving towards evictions in these cases. This had included the Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply actively encouraging providers to join the Homes for Cathy initiative. This saw housing associations come together to raise awareness of the needs of the homeless and to develop strategies to end homelessness.
- Her service had seen a genuine focus by housing associations on financial inclusion. This was positive and meant residents could be better supported through financial issues which could otherwise threaten their tenancies.
- However, there were a wide range of other challenges which more vulnerable residents could face and which housing associations could – in general – provide greater levels of support in. A more holistic approach was needed for tenants.
- Particular aspects needing improvement included mental health support.
- Another was domestic abuse. On this, the Council had seen instances of very worrying practice. In some cases providers were reluctant to take ownership and to work proactively with the survivor and the Council. In too many cases, providers only referred survivors to the Council for their cases to be managed within statutory homelessness processes.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act had introduced a ‘duty to refer’. This covered Housing associations, and required them to flag with the local authority where someone was at risk of homelessness. The process had generally worked well, but there were issues in some cases around a lack of information being provided – any specific health issues for example - which could prevent the Council from being able to tailor its approaches to a person’s needs.

- It was important to note the Council had seen some very concerning cases. There were instances where vulnerable tenants had been evicted by housing associations onto the streets, and where the Council had only become aware after this point. In some cases, the Council had needed to provide Homelessness Reduction Grant funding towards clearing vulnerable tenants' arrears so that they could move back into their homes.
- There was evidence of good practice among some housing associations around rough sleeping, including by Genesis. They worked well with the Council's outreach teams and educated staff around how to approach cases of rough sleeping. Others could learn from this.
- The Council spent significant amounts on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP); £479,000 in 2018/19 and £402,000 for 2019/20 so far. Significant shares of this funding was allocated to housing association residents to help prevent homelessness. However, there were questions to ask about the extent of action by housing associations themselves to improve the sustainability of these residents' tenancies.
- In particular, DHP payments were often provided to supplement the benefit received by over occupying households who were affected by spare room subsidy (bedroom tax). DHP payment should ideally be used as a temporary solution in these cases, whilst social landlords supported households to downsize. By downsizing, a resident's tenancy could be made affordable in the longer term. It could also free up a much needed larger-size home for another family.
- However, the numbers of Housing Association households affected by the bedroom tax were falling very slowly. They currently stood at 1132. In addition, only 17 referrals by housing associations had been made to the Council's rehousing team, which could provide downsizing support. This left questions about the extent of any action by housing associations in this area.
- In terms of improvements which could be made, a key one was around communications, and the Council being made aware earlier in the process where a resident was at risk of losing their tenancy. Currently, the service often only became aware of matters after a housing association had instigated legal proceedings to gain possession, or after an eviction took place. This left little opportunity for the Council to help explore any additional support which could better enable a vulnerable resident to remain in their home, and for them to be helped and supported before they faced the trauma of becoming homeless.
- This change could be supported by stronger data sharing and referral protocols between the Council and housing associations.
- Another improvement would be for housing associations to accept the nominations made by the Council in all cases, rather than the current situation where these were sometimes refused.
- The nomination agreement in place allowed (in general terms) the Council to nominate on 75% of housing associations lets. Given the scale of the affordable housing crisis, and the Council being the central point from which households in

the greatest housing need were supported, the service would welcome a change seeing the Council receive 100% nomination rights.

- The use of Affordable Rents by housing associations could make units unaffordable to some of those in the greatest housing need. Conversion of these to social rent would better enable providers to fulfil their role of helping the Council meet its housing need and homelessness duties.
- There was a need for a consistent effective approach for cases involving domestic violence, followed by all housing associations. There had been very concerning practice in some cases. She hoped that all housing associations would take up the challenge of working towards the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.
- The service also saw a need for a greater contribution by housing associations through increases in sanctuary schemes. These schemes put in measures to enable people at risk to remain safely in their homes, where they wished to do so. The need for these schemes – amongst both survivors of domestic abuse and families at risk of gang related harm - was increasing.
- There was a high need for adapted properties in the borough. A current shared list of all adapted properties could better allow these to be best utilised.

4.9 The Chair thanked the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs.

4.10 A Member was interested in exploring the potential for a common housing register / waiting list between the Council and housing associations operating in Hackney. She asked how this might work.

4.11 The Head of Benefits Housing Needs said that a common housing register was in place in a number of London borough. This saw a single register developed between the Council and participating housing associations. Her own view was that this would not necessarily be something of benefit in Hackney.

4.12 For Hackney, households could apply to join the Council's housing register through completing an application online or manually. Her service would then assess the application to determine the household's meeting of eligibility criteria, and their level of housing need. Subject to them being found to be eligible, the household was added to the housing register within one of the priority bands (based on its level of housing need). They could then apply for homes via the choice based lettings scheme.

4.13 Data on the housing register and on lets highlighted the affordable housing crisis in the borough. For 2019/20, the Council was expecting to provide lets for around 400 households on its register (through its own stock and nominations on housing association units combined). This compared to 13,500 households on the register, around 35% of which were in high priority.

4.14 The lets that there were, were directed at those households in the greatest need. With there being very few compared to demand, those households being forward would generally have very significant needs. These commonly included people who were fleeing from violence, who were fit to leave hospital but who

- could not do so due to needing a suitable home, who had physical or mental ill health, and or who had children with very significant needs.
- 4.15 It also meant that those in the lower priority bands - in reality - had very little prospect of being housed through the housing register. Given this, there was an ongoing need for other options including mutual exchanges, cross-London homefinder schemes, and any viable private rented sector options to be communicated to these households, as the service sought to do. In practice, the register would provide a housing solution for an extremely small share of Hackney's residents.
- 4.16 A Member noted from the paper provided that the Council was arranging a meeting with Housing associations to seek to address issues including refusals of nominations and miscommunications around the readiness of units given to the Council to nominate on. She asked when this meeting would take place.
- 4.17 The Head of Benefits Housing Needs said that regularly-scheduled meetings between the Council and Housing associations were in place, through the Better Homes Partnership. There had been a move to make these meetings more lettings-focused in order to help work through these issues. It was important to note that relationships between the lettings teams in her service and housing associations were generally strong.
- 4.18 The Director, Regeneration confirmed the Better Homes Partnership delivered 8 formal meetings a year; 4 focused on development and 4 on housing management aspects including lettings. These meetings were chaired by Housing associations. Attendance levels and engagement by different providers varied, as did the outcomes they delivered. In addition to these formal sessions, additional meetings with individual or groups of relevant providers were arranged to discuss particular issues as needed. He noted that the next formal meeting of this Commission was due to explore the partnership arrangements in place in Hackney compared to others, in more detail.
- 4.19 The Chair noted the Head of Benefits Housing Needs' points around those being housed through the housing register often bring vulnerable and having complex needs, and around Housing associations needing to do more to enable them to sustain their tenancies. She asked – in relation to households living in the Council's homes – what things the Council were doing to support households which Housing associations sometimes did not. She asked what best practice looked like in this area.
- 4.20 The Head of Benefits and Housing Needs said that in short – there was a need to take ownership and to provide a holistic response which addressed the wide range of issues which as a combination might be threatening the ability of a household to maintain their tenancy.
- 4.21 This absolutely involved working with partner agencies. There were external sources of support which housing associations could be more effective in brokering for their residents in some cases. This included social care services in the Council, and health services more widely. The Council gave funding to advice providers, who could help with financial, legal and other difficulties.

- 4.22 There was a need to recognise and act upon early signifiers. If a resident stopped engaging with a service, this was sometimes a sign that help was needed, and the service needed to proactively explore how they could be effectively re-engaged and supported. It was the case that new residents to social housing were more likely to be among the most vulnerable. Some would have unsurfaced trauma, for example, which could manifest itself in harmful behaviour at a later point. There was a need for social housing providers to be aware of the range of vulnerabilities which high shares of their residents were likely to be suffering from, and to have systems which worked to identify at early points where help might be needed. For example, it was not enough to wait for a resident to get in significant arrears and then dealing this solely as an arrears issue. Arrears emerging in the first place needed to trigger early contact, including making intense efforts to secure contact where this was required.
- 4.23 A proactive approach needed to be embedded across organisations. Staff or contractors carrying out repairs work should be trained in spotting signs that residents might be having difficulties and in how these concerns should be escalated, for example. This could help organisations reach a point where every contact or intervention with a resident could best contribute to tenancies being sustained.
- 4.24 A Member noted the point around 1,132 Housing Association households being affected by the bedroom tax, yet providers only making 17 referrals to the Council support offer around downsizing. She noted the financial burden on families affected by the bedroom tax, combined with the pressing need to free up larger homes for the families in most need of them. She also was concerned that there could be some residents – particularly older residents – who could be more vulnerable due to living in a home which was too large and unsuitable for them. She asked whether the Council tracked the numbers of council tenants who were under occupying, and about the approaches taken in these cases.
- 4.25 The Head of Benefits and Housing Need noted that the 1132 households cited were housing association households of working age; as it was working age households who were eligible for the spare room subsidy. There would be older under occupying households also. These numbers were aside from under occupying households within the Council's stock. There was a need for a joined up approach to the issue.
- 4.26 Tower Hamlets had seen some success in working together with housing associations to support under occupying tenants in both housing association and council stock, to downsize. She hoped that this could be replicated in Hackney, although any approach would need to be tailored to the needs of Hackney residents. There was more to do to support over occupying residents who could find the prospect of moving – even to another home very close by – challenging. Extensive and intense support was needed in these cases.
- 4.27 Significant progress would rely on a broad, joined up approach by the Council and housing associations – for example through delivering include joint events aimed at all over occupying households in the borough.



- 4.28 For the Council's part, the Housing Policy and Strategy Service had embarked on a data matching exercise which would better identify under occupying households so that they could be worked with.
- 4.29 Elaborating on this, the Interim Director, Regeneration advised the baseline research for this work had now been completed. This had produced data showing under-occupying households and – as far as possible – any individual vulnerabilities or complex needs which were present. This would help inform later stages of work where the Council would seek to provide the tailored support needed to enable households to take up units which were more suitable for them. He agreed that intensive support would be required in many cases, including for some older occupying residents. However, this work would be invaluable in enabling residents to move into units which were more suitable and sustainable for them, whilst freeing up the much needed larger units for those households in most need.
- 4.30 A Member asked if this exercise was focused on all social housing units, or only the Council's stock. She saw the need for it to cover all social housing in the borough; from where she lived in the borough she was aware of quite vulnerable, single residents living in large housing association homes which would be difficult to maintain, whilst other families nearby were living in quite badly overcrowded conditions.
- 4.31 The Interim Director, Regeneration, confirmed that the initial stages of the work was focused on the Council's stock, but that they would be seeking to work with housing associations on expanding this. Housing associations could also play a crucial role in supporting the Council to source suitable alternative accommodation for under occupying households.
- 4.32 The Chair thanked Council Officers. She asked guests from housing associations to make brief opening comments. With Members having read the papers provided in advance, she asked that these be limited to key points.
- 4.33 The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA made the following points:
- ISHA were thankful to the support from the Council to enable tenancy sustainment. ISHA were committed to providing and brokering the support which enabled residents to remain and thrive within their homes wherever possible. Dedicated support workers in the organisation did regularly call on external services in the Council and elsewhere to help achieve this.
  - There was a focus on enabling tenancies to get off to a good start, and homes being made to feel like a home. Examples of this included the provision of new carpets and curtains and of white goods in some cases.
  - Noting the points made earlier around affordability checks, she confirmed that ISHA did not carry out these for its homes for social rent, which made up the large majority (875) of its stock in Hackney. It did have 76 Affordable Tent properties, and affordability checks were carried out for prospective tenants of these.
  - This was within an aim of helping to ensure that these units were allocated to those for whom they would be sustainable in the long term. Unlike some other providers, affordable rent homes let by ISHA were let on lifetime tenancies.

- ISHA did have some concerns around how the nominations process between themselves and the Council worked where nominations were being made for Affordable Rent homes. This was in relation to the Council sometimes deeming these units as affordable to a household given that they were on full benefits, whilst not fully taking into account that the unit might no longer be affordable if the household's circumstances changed, including take up of employment. ISHA's affordability checks in these cases aimed to help ensure that households were not inadvertently trapped from being able to take up work.
- She welcomed the points from the Council's Head of Benefits and Housing Needs around the need to strengthen processes between the Council and Housing associations around nominations agreements. They wished to work with the Council to streamline the process. Things did generally work well in terms of the timeliness of the Council providing nominees for properties and their details.
- However, noting the points around the need for greater information sharing by Housing associations, there was sometimes a lack of detail provided by the Council around the needs of those being nominated by them. She accepted that this might be down to issues only surfacing at later points. However, ISHA would welcome working with the Council to improve communications from both sides.
- This said, it was important to note that the numbers of lets were quite low – around 50 a year in total across ISHA's stock both in Hackney and elsewhere. 2018/19 had seen 8 ISHA lettings nominated by the Council, with 12 so far for 2019/20. This highlighted that the interaction between the Council and ISHA regarding lettings, was limited.

4.34 The Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group made the following points:

- There would be similarities between providers around how they delivered functions including lettings and tenancy sustainment. She therefore wished to focus her points around areas where she felt there could be greater partnership working
- Clarion managed around 1,800 units in Hackney.
- Lettings activity in the borough was limited, with 21 lettings in total for the period January 2019 to January 2020. 95% of these had been allocated the Council to nominate on; higher than the requirements set down in the nominations agreement.
- The large majority of Clarion units let in Hackney were one or two bed units, illustrating the shortage of new lettings for larger families.
- She welcomed points around the need for joint work to support and facilitate downsizing by under occupying households, which Clarion would welcome involvement with. She agreed with the points made by Council Officers around the intense work which was needed to support under occupying residents into a position where they wanted and felt able to move.

- Mental health was a key area. Clarion had a well-structured sustainment team. However, referrals into the service around this had been limited. She agreed with the need for greater engagement.
- On the points around sanctuary schemes, she agreed that housing associations had crucial roles in enabling vulnerable residents to remain in their homes, and also in utilising their stock in wider areas to enable moves where there was a need.
- She would welcome further discussions around how Clarion could work with the Council more closely.

4.35 The Head of Housing, Sanctuary made the following points:

- Sanctuary were generally happy with the way that the nominations process between themselves and the Council was working. They were on track in providing the Council with the shares of nominations as per the agreement.
- The Sanctuary units in Hackney which were not let through the nominations agreement with the Council, were let through management transfers which followed processes set down in policy. Management transfers could be very effective, including in some cases where people were fleeing domestic violence, and within downsizing initiatives. Using shares of voids for management transfers did help to prevent some households from having to enter the homelessness process through the Council.
- Sanctuary sought to work closely with the Council. As an example, in her previous role of Head of Lettings she had worked with the Housing Needs Service – and with the households concerned - to successfully rehouse a number of homeless families from Hackney's housing register, in suitable properties outside the area. As an organisation with housing stock across the country, there was the prospect for partnership work with the Council to provide alternative housing options, where residents were willing to consider them.
- Sanctuary worked positively with St Mungo's in Hackney, and were making more properties available to be operated within St Mungo schemes. This was within an aim of achieving tenancy sustainability for vulnerable residents.
- Noting the point made earlier about some of the units allocated to the Council to nominate on later being found to need significant works, she accepted that the conditions of properties at the end of tenancies could be an issue. Sanctuary were rolling out a scheme following a pilot where trade supervisors carried out end of tenancy inspections. This had resulted in less properties needing major works prior to a new tenant moving in.
- Sanctuary did not follow affordability checks. However, they did deliver pre tenancy assessments which sought to identify any support needs present. Tenants were never rejected based on these assessments, which only aimed to ensure that adequate support was in place to best achieve tenancy sustainment.
- Like the Council, Sanctuary had also carried out an assessment aiming to identify under occupying households in order that they could be best supported into more suitable accommodation. She would welcome dialogue around how

this work could complement the Council's, and any joint working with the Council and other housing associations around under occupation.

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

- One Housing managed just over 800 properties in Hackney. This stock was very stable in terms of tenancies; there had only been 2 relets amongst these units in 2019/20 to date.
- There was a commitment to long term tenancies and tenancy sustainment. The Board had approved moving away from fixed term tenancies.
- More widely on sustainment, over 8,000 One Housing residents were supported by the Care and Support part of the business. This reflected the high level of internal expertise which was in place. Moving forward, there was more to do to cross-fertilise this expertise across the organisation so that all staff – including those on the front line - could make contributions to enabling more vulnerable people to thrive in their homes.
- One Housing did deliver affordability checks. These were not about rejecting prospective tenants but rather having an opportunity to consider how a tenancy could be made successful and sustainable. Within this, there was a focus on ensuring that relevant support was in place for a new resident.
- This said, the organisation did need to get better at recognising early warning signs that residents might be in difficulty, and intervening at these points rather than allowing issues to escalate. There was a dedicated team focused on tenancy sustainment who did very good work. However, they would welcome working closely with the Council and other providers so there could be a joint focus on improvement and learning from best practice.

4.37 The Head of Allocations and Lettings, L&Q made the following points:

- L&Q managed around 1300 general needs properties in Hackney.
- As appeared the case with other providers, tenancy turnover was quite low, with 14 lets having taken place in the financial year to date.
- In addition to allocating units to Hackney as per nominations agreements, L&Q had an internal transfer list through which households could request moves. They also delivered direct lets where residents needed to move due to emergencies. A dedicated rehousing service facilitated these moves (and also decant cases where residents needed to leave their properties whilst major works were carried out).
- This said – and perhaps reflecting the lack of churn within its stock – it was increasingly difficult for these moves to be delivered.
- Given this, L&Q had established a new Mobility Team which worked to encourage mutual exchanges as a means of achieving greater flexibility for residents. This would better allow residents to move when they wished to do so. L&Q would welcome closer work with Councils and other providers to widen options for tenants and residents generally.

- L&Q had stopped issuing fixed term tenancies. It did not carry out affordability checks.
- They had a strong void standard, with homes re-carpeted and redecorated prior to a new tenant moving into a property. This had translated into high customer satisfaction rates.

4.38 The Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership made the following points:

- Guinness had a strong relationship with the Council.
- They were on track against the nomination agreement, although Guinness also had their own internal transfers process which mostly aided people needing emergency moves due to issues including domestic abuse or risk from gangs.
- They carried out sustainability checks prior to take up of tenancy to determine any support needs, and localised and centralised teams worked to ensure this was in place.
- They were also committed to providing support to existing residents where this was needed, and to intervening at early points. As acknowledged by others, they did not always get this right and would welcome working with other providers and the Council towards achieving best practice. He hoped that Guinness were effective in raising cases with the Council where residents required external support, but he would welcome further explorations of this.
- A hardship fund helped to support those experiencing financial difficulty to take up tenancies and maintain them.
- Guinness had moved away from fixed term tenancies towards life time tenancies.
- They worked closely with Crisis. They welcomed Housing First initiatives which sought to provide a vulnerable person with a stable home which could enable them to focus on recovery and to engage with services.
- There was an issue around under occupation. Guinness delivered initiatives seeking to persuade people to move but this was very challenging. In some cases units which were now under-occupied had been people's homes for many years, and there was a reluctance to move from them. Guinness would welcome close working with partners to seek to make progress in this agenda.
- He noted the Council's concerns around the number of lettings allocated to them to nominate on had fallen. However, this was reflective of general falls in lettings overall, in both Hackney and elsewhere.

4.39 The Chief Operating Officer, Peabody made the following points:

- Peabody managed around 6,700 properties in Hackney. They had developed a very good relationship with the Council's Housing Needs Service, and worked within the nominations agreement in place.
- There was a focus on its general needs stock being used to house and support those in most housing need. Units not being allocated through the Council were

used to rehouse those on Peabody's internal transfer list, with priority given to the most vulnerable.

- There was an ongoing focus on tenancy sustainment, from the starting point. Pre tenancy checks helped to ensure any required support was put in place. A Tenancy Sustainment Team provided a range of services for existing residents in need, including a handyman service, a tenant welfare fund, befriending, hoarding support.
- They had established facilities in the community to provide support, advice and signposting.
- One issue which Peabody was encountering was a correlation between hoarding behaviour and mental ill health. Hoarding could bring risks around resident safety. In these cases there was a challenge to balance the need to ensure the safety of residents whilst providing support to vulnerable people.
- Peabody had ended fixed term tenancies. The nominations agreement between Peabody and the Council generally worked well, but dated to 1997. Peabody would welcome a review of this, perhaps within a wider discussion around making progress on wider issues.

4.40 The Chair thanked guests. She noted from the points made that Housing associations managed their own internal transfer lists, and allocated some of their lettings through this rather than giving them to the Council to nominate on. Despite this, she was aware that providers often referred their households to the Council in order to seek rehousing, rather than appearing to provide housing solutions themselves. From her ward, she was aware that this included some households living in properties managed by Sanctuary, who were overcrowded. She asked if there was room for improvement in the way that housing associations used the lettings which they retained nominations on.

4.41 Responding to this point, the Head of Housing, Sanctuary confirmed that there were a number of large households living in homes which were overcrowded. These cases generally resulted from families expanding over time, and outgrowing their home. Sanctuary did seek to address this through giving priority to these households when a suitable larger home became available. However, the key challenge was around the availability of homes big enough. For example, Sanctuary were currently trying to rehouse a household of 11 individuals. Suitable accommodation was very difficult to find, both in terms of bedroom numbers and other facilities. There were very few in Hackney.

4.42 Sanctuary was seeking to address these challenges. In some cases, existing units were extended to make them large enough. Another potential solution was to support overcrowded households to relocate to larger properties when they were available in other areas. This said, a barrier to this was an unwillingness of households to relocate. This was of course understandable given that households did not want to leave their social and support networks. However, there was also sometimes significant reluctance to move a very small distance.

4.43 The Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group appreciated the concerns around the need for housing associations to contribute to supporting

- overcrowded households. This said – for Clarion at least – it was not the case that it had many larger units to provide to those in need of them. 70% to 80% of Clarion's units were 1 or 2 bedroom units. Churn on the units that it did have was quite low. She felt that there might be a perception that housing associations had greater numbers of large units than was the case.
- 4.44 This said, she felt there was room to better ensure that larger sized accommodation across the borough was best utilised. She felt there would be value in a mapping exercise seeking to detail all the larger units in the borough, managed by Housing associations. This could help to provide a more accurate picture around how much of a role housing associations could play in housing larger families.
- 4.45 Clarion did have its own transfer list. However, this was managed within a genuine commitment to achieving sustainable communities. Where units were not taken by internal transfer, Clarion gave them to the Council to allocate on. This was reflected in the Council receiving higher shares of nominations than set out in the nominations agreement.
- 4.46 A Member asked how Housing associations and the Council might work more effectively together to address the issues mentioned tonight regarding lettings.
- 4.47 The Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody felt there could be benefit from a Lettings Forum in Hackney in which the Council and Housing associations could come together to work through the kinds of issues which had been raised here. He had been involved in forums held in other boroughs.
- 4.48 Adding to this, the Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group noted the Council and Housing associations did regularly meet through the existing Better Homes Partnership. She suggested that sections of one or more of these meetings might be allocated to discussing lettings and tenancy sustainment aspects. She felt using existing forums might better ensure engagement than creating a new one focused specifically on lettings.
- 4.49 A Member noted the point from the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs around the potential for the Council to receive 100% nominations on housing association properties so that they could be directed at those in most need. She asked if housing associations in attendance would consider agreeing to this.
- 4.50 The Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group suggested that this could be an item for discussion. However, Clarion's management board would need to approve a change on this scale. Her own view was that this might not be likely.
- 4.51 Clarion were committed to supporting sustainable communities. In terms of new development, its Balanced Communities Strategy saw a minimum of 25% of units in new developments targeted at those in most housing need. Shares of these units would be allocated to local authorities to nominate on, within the nominations agreements in place.
- 4.52 This said, Clarion did recognise that pressure on affordable housing availability was particularly high in some areas. In reflection of this, they would be open to

considering localised lettings plans in these areas. This was perhaps an area for further discussion.

- 4.53 The Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership agreed that there could be room for discussion around the shares of nominations which the Council received, both for existing stock and new development. He accepted the concern around the very large numbers of households on the Council's waiting list, and the reducing number of lettings made available with which to support them. However, there was value in providers retaining shares of units to allocate on themselves. This enabled them to help respond to their own residents' needs directly. He did not see that moving to a 100% nominations agreement with the Council would necessarily better enable housing need to be met.
- 4.54 The Head of Housing, Sanctuary agreed with these points. A change to 100% nominations arrangement would need board approval, and there would be concern about the impact that it would have on the organisation's ability to provide solutions for those in urgent need of help, including cases involving domestic violence.
- 4.55 Invited to feed in at this point, the Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply said she had been left hugely concerned by cases referred to her where vulnerable housing association residents with sometimes complex needs, were not receiving the support they needed.
- 4.56 One aspect she was particularly concerned about was the support and care provided to residents with mental ill health. She had seen instances of extremely worrying practice where - instead of assisting very vulnerable residents to access the care and support pathways they needed - providers they had moved to eviction.
- 4.57 This had included the eviction of a resident who had then been found to be rough sleeping outside their property. In another case a provider had arranged a psychiatric assessment and used the findings that a resident had capacity to justify an eviction due to rent arrears.
- 4.58 These kinds of approaches could have very significant impacts on the health and well-being of already vulnerable residents. She would welcome discussions around how all providers could get to a position where they sought to recognise early signifiers that residents might need support, and to intervene at these points.
- 4.59 Another aspect of concern was around the support provided to housing association residents seeking to flee domestic abuse. She had seen some really concerning responses to these calls for help. One example had been a case ending with the Council rehousing a survivor in temporary accommodation, after her housing association refused to help on the grounds that there had apparently not been any violent incidents involving the household for a particular period. The individual was actually at immense risk, and she found herself having to risk losing her secure tenancy due to the unwillingness of her provider to respond.



- 4.60 Another example was where a provider had refused to support one of its residents to move despite their case having been overseen by a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), due to the high risk they were at.
- 4.61 As mentioned by the Head of Benefits and Housing Needs, the Council would really encourage all providers to seek the DAHA accreditation. Accreditation required promoting awareness and education around domestic abuse, across organisations. It could help providers reach a position where all staff were better able to spot warning signs that someone might be suffering from abuse and to act upon this. For example, particular patterns around repairs requests could sometimes indicate potentially harmful behaviour. She would welcome hearing the experiences of any providers who had signed up to the accreditation.
- 4.62 Coming back on these point, the Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA advised that ISHA were not currently DAHA accredited, but that she would explore the potential for this moving forward. ISHA did have measures in place, with safeguarding training provided to operatives who visited homes so they could identify and act upon indicators including repeated repairs. Processes were in place to enable these cases to be escalated effectively. These could result in referrals to the local authority and or interviews with people who it was felt might be at risk. ISHA were committed to supporting victims of domestic abuse and were open to developing further in this.
- 4.63 The Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group said One Housing were given renewed focus to these issues, with lessons learnt exercises delivered to teams and revised safeguarding training being delivered to all staff including at board level. This was giving messaging that cases should be flagged and referred wherever there was any suspicion that someone might be at risk of harm. One Housing did benefit from having a very skilled Care and Support arm of the business. They were actively exploring how this knowledge could be transferred to all staff coming into contact with residents across all their stock, including their general needs homes. She agreed with the increasing need for a holistic, wide ranging support offer for all residents.
- 4.64 In relation to mental ill health, domestic violence and other areas, she agreed on the need for earlier identification and intervention in cases.
- 4.65 This was crucial but also challenging – the ability to identify where care and support might be needed was a real skill, which One Housing were looking to further develop amongst its staff. They would welcome joint discussions around how the Council and all providers could further improve in this area, and learn from each other. This would increase the effectiveness of providers as social purpose organisations. Earlier identification and interventions which prevented issues escalating also made business sense.
- 4.66 She was impressed that the Council was seeking to influence improvement by housing associations in these areas. It was important to note that in a lot of cases, One Housing and (she suspected) other providers did successfully intervene to support their residents. These cases were probably less likely to come to the attention of the Council than cases where things went wrong. This said, there was a need for further improvement and she would welcome all providers working together to learn from one another.

- 4.67 The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply thanked the Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group. She agreed that there were cases where housing associations had been very effective in supporting vulnerable residents. She welcomed that a number of providers had worked towards the DAHA accreditation. She hoped that all parties could work together to enable good practice in more cases.
- 4.68 The Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody agreed that providers did effective work to support residents in many cases. Peabody were DAHA accredited, and had been one of the organisations which had established the scheme.
- 4.69 Peabody did provide significant levels of support to residents in Hackney. For example, for the year to date they had supported 160 vulnerable people with mental ill health and had enabled 8 internal moves of vulnerable residents. They had 100 units for rough sleepers in the borough.
- 4.70 The Chair noted points made about the positive work of housing associations in many cases. This said, she also noted some of the concerns raised – including there sometimes being unexpected delays in residents nominated by the Council being able to move into a property, the rejection of nominations in some cases, a lack of progress around over occupation, and there sometimes being a real lack of support and early intervention for vulnerable housing association residents. This was alongside the major issue of shortages of homes for those in most need.
- 4.71 What she saw as particularly positive was the clear willingness of housing associations providers to work more closely with the Council so that these issues could be best addressed or explored. She noted that the relationship between the Council and housing associations was managed through the borough's Better Homes Partnership. She noted that the next meeting would seek to explore the strengths of this arrangement in enabling the Council and providers to work together effectively, and other potential options. She looked forward to this as it appeared that on lettings aspects alone there were a range of areas in which joint work could be improved.
- 4.72 Adding to these points, the Mayoral Advisor, Private Renting and Housing Affordability welcomed earlier points around work to get tenancies off to a good start. She agreed on the need (which had been partly recognised in this meeting) for this to be expanded to ongoing and extensive tenancy sustainment work.
- 4.73 She noted that the next item would explore development activity by housing associations in Hackney, which was generally falling. She did feel that this reduction did lead to the question of where any financial surpluses generated from activity in Hackney were being directed at, if not on development. She did see the need for greater investment to improve the condition of stock, and also to provide greater support to residents.
- 4.74 Noting the Chair's point that the next meeting would explore the arrangements in place to support the partnership between the Council and Housing associations, she confirmed that the Council was looking to review these. She looked forward to that discussion which could help shape plans. However, she

- wished to note that the structure in its current form and any revised version, would benefit from housing associations being represented by more senior officers than was the case currently. Currently, those representing housing associations at these meetings often did not have the authority to make the decisions which could move matters forward. She welcomed the level of seniority which was present in this meeting, and hoped that this could be replicated in partnership meetings going forward. This could help better address a range of factors around lettings, housing management, asset management and development.
- 4.75 Adding to this, the Interim Director, Regeneration confirmed that the current partnership structures in place did see regular formal meetings, set around a number of themes. There was room for improvement in the effectiveness of this structure. This included its capacity to enable progress to be made on partnership priorities around sustainable communities and an inclusive economy. There were inconsistencies in the engagement of housing associations in the structure, and in the seniority of housing association representatives. He hoped that a revision of the structure would be shaped with significant involvement of housing associations. He hoped for an arrangement which allowed for candid and open discussions, and for decisions to be made to make progress. He looked forward to the next scrutiny meeting which would explore this further.
- 4.76 The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA was relatively new to the organisation, and was not aware of the partnership meetings. However, she would welcome the opportunity to attend them. She agreed on the need for senior officers to be represented at these meetings so that decisions and ways forward could be determined and agreed, in the meetings themselves.
- 4.77 A Member noted that a number of providers had affordability checks in place, and that there was some concern that these might be used as a means of rejecting a nomination from the Council. She also noted references to sustainability checks by some of the providers not carrying out these affordability checks. She asked if either or both might be being used to reject nominations from the Council.
- 4.78 The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA reiterated that affordability checks were only carried out for Affordable Rent units, within an aim of ensuring they would be sustainable for a household for the longer term. They did not carry them out for social rent properties.
- 4.79 The Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group confirmed that the affordability checks which were carried out for all new lettings were focused on ensuring that any support and assistance was in place to enable tenancy sustainment.
- 4.80 The Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership said checks were carried out within an aim of tenancy sustainment, and not one of rejecting nominees. He was not aware of his organisation having rejected any nomination from the Council.
- 4.81 The Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody also did not recognise accounts that nominees were generally being refused. The checks carried out by

Peabody were further to those carried out by the Council prior to making the nomination. Peabody's assessment was focused on checking the information provided by the Council around any needs of the household, seeking to identify any others, and then ensuring that measures were put in place to meet them. Peabody's core purpose was to provide social housing, including by supporting the Council to help address the housing crisis.

- 4.82 The Chair thanked guests for these points. She asked the Head of Benefits Housing Needs wished to elaborate on the issue mentioned in the paper around rejections of nominations.
- 4.83 The Head of Benefits Housing Needs said that there was good and bad practice in place. The use of Affordable Rent had led to more rejections on affordability grounds. She would encourage housing associations to move away from this type of tenure as it did not meet the needs of the households in Hackney who were in most need.
- 4.85 The Director of Customer Services confirmed that the Benefits and Housing Needs Service fell within her remit. They had picked up on issues in the past and had worked with housing associations on a one to one basis to achieve improvement, with some success. There was very good practice in cases.
- 4.86 However, more was needed in order to achieve consistent approaches. The example case studies the service had provided in their paper were intended to highlight the need for further improvement. Some of these had needed the Council to get involved, and to escalate cases to Chief Executive level before issues were resolved. Examples did include evictions of very vulnerable residents with no prior dialogue with the Council, despite organisations having tenancy sustainment policies in place. She hoped that the Council and all providers could work together to achieve good practice across the sector in Hackney.
- 4.87 The Regional Lettings Manager, L&Q felt it was positive that it appeared that in general providers were not rejecting nominations from the Council. However, he noted that providers of general needs accommodation could face genuine challenges in being able to support very vulnerable residents with complex needs including mental ill health, to sustain their tenancies for the long term. Sometimes despite all efforts providers were not equipped to do this. In addition to challenging housing associations around their tenancy sustainment work, there were also perhaps questions to ask around the level and nature of wider support provision.
- 4.88 The Director of Customer Services accepted these points. The Council themselves faced challenges around supporting some of those living in its general needs stock, who in the longer term were likely to need to live in supported housing. She appreciated the challenges in achieving tenancy sustainment for some very vulnerable residents.
- 4.89 However – and going back to earlier points around the need for early interventions – she hoped that providers in these cases might seek at earlier points to identify the need for alternative accommodation, and to work with the Council and others to put this in place, prior to issues escalating and a resident then being put through the trauma of eviction.

- 4.90 The Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group agreed with these points. Providers and the staff working for them were generally committed to supporting vulnerable people. In some cases, general needs units would not be suitable for people. Better data sharing and partnership arrangements between the Council and Housing associations could better enable residents to be provided the accommodation which was suitable and sustainable for them in the first place, and for joint measures to be taken at earlier points where issues emerged during tenancies. She would welcome closer working around this.
- 4.91 The Director of Customer Services thanked the Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group. She felt that the fundamental issues went back to the crucial need for all providers being effective at identifying and acting upon the support needs of its residents. The Council itself was carrying out work seeking to ensure that all its services played a full role in supporting tenancy sustainment for residents in its properties. It was the case that increasing shares of the residents in general needs stock had vulnerabilities, and there was a need for join up with wider services including health and social care.
- 4.92 A Member noted a point around Affordable Rent, and the view that these should be replaced with social rents in all cases. This said, she was an advocate of Affordable Rent being within the mix of affordable housing options, along with homes for Social Rent. Affordable Rent homes did provide sustainable housing solutions for some households who would not be able to access social housing, and could help contribute to achieving sustainable and mixed communities.
- 4.93 She also asked whether housing associations could be flexible around providing opportunities for residents currently renting their homes, to buy them through shared ownership. She noted earlier points around the Council's work to gain better insight into its tenants, which could help inform under occupation initiatives. She asked whether data could similarly be used to help identify those tenants who might be able and interested in buying through shared ownership, and to seek to provide support around this.
- 4.94 The Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group said that Clarion did not allow for rented homes to be bought on a shared ownership basis. However, they actively promoted options around shared ownership to their tenants and provided support and advice around this.

## **5 Evidence gathering for review - Development of new homes by Housing Associations and approaches to existing stock**

- 5.1 The following guests were in attendance for this item:
- Cllr Rebecca Rennison, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Finance, Housing Needs and Supply
  - Kay Brown, Director of Customer Services
  - Jennifer Wynter, Head of Benefits and Housing Needs
  - James Goddard, Interim Director, Regeneration
  - Marcia Facey, Operations Manager, Benefits and Housing Needs
  - Catherine Kyne, Regional Director, London, Clarion Housing Group

- Alexandra Willey, Director of Strategic Asset Management, Clarion Housing Group
- Iain Taylor, Partnerships Director, Clarion Housing Group
- John Cockerham, Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership
- Alistair Smyth, Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership
- Dawn Harrisson, Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods, ISHA
- Olukunle Olujide, Director of Development, ISHA
- Elaine Ambrose, Business Development Manager, L&Q
- Sam Osborne, Regional Lettings Manager, L&Q
- Chyrel Brown, Chief Operating Officer, One Housing Group
- Rob Marcantoni, Commercial & Property Director, One Housing Group
- Ashling Fox, Chief Operating Officer, Peabody
- George Kirby – Head of Lettings & Rehousing, Peabody
- Kimberley De Vergori, Head of Housing, Sanctuary
- Conan Farningham, Head of Land and Planning, Sanctuary

5.2 The Interim Director, Regeneration, made the following opening points:

- The national policy context around housing had been fluid over recent years.
- Post the 2019 general elections, indications were that home ownership would be one of its main areas of focus.
- There was significant interest from profit making registered providers in developing in Hackney and across London. He felt these organisations would be seen by Government as playing a major role in delivery of their policies in forthcoming years
- Hackney had been quite unique in moving to direct delivery of new housing through its regeneration programmes, which had now been in place for almost a decade.
- The model was similar to that of developing registered providers, with in house-specialisms in design and delivery. The programme was focused on the delivery of 4 types of stock – social rent, shared ownership, Hackney Living Rent, and units for open market sale, the proceeds from which subsidised the homes for social rent.
- In this way the Council had a cross subsidy model generally similar to that of registered providers, although it was important to note that Hackney's focus was on securing subsidy for the delivery of social rented homes. The Hackney Living Rent model aimed to provide housing at rents broadly in line with a third of household incomes.
- There were challenges around the cross subsidy model. It relied on a buoyant and active housing market, but there had been falls in activity. Development costs were increasing. For providers of affordable housing, this had been compounded by falls in subsidy from government. Combined, these factors helped to explain why the number of new units delivered by housing associations had fallen, as per the table in the paper provided.

- New development needed to play a key role in helping to address the crisis in the supply of affordable housing. However, there were other aspects also which as the local housing authority Hackney was working to address.
  - Examples included working to enforce against buy to leave (where investors bought properties and left them empty), working closely with the private rented sector, and better enabling more effective use of existing affordable housing stock.
  - Another example was seeking to prevent the loss of affordable housing units in the borough through sales disposals by housing associations. His service had a protocol which sought to prevent the loss of this stock, setting an expectation that providers flagged with the Council where it was intending to make a disposal so that the Council could either purchase the unit or seek another affordable housing provider to do so. Sales of affordable housing units to the open market could cause real and understandable upset to the community. Mapping of sales disposals highlighted that this activity was centred in the more expensive areas of the borough, brining concern around greater gentrification.
  - He made a plea that all providers followed this protocol.
  - Going back to new development, the Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge (MOHHC) was a fund through which the Council made Right to Buy receipts available to housing associations to develop in the borough.
  - This was a multi-million pound fund and there was real pressure to get this money allocated. If it was not – conversely – it would need to be paid to government and would be lost the borough. He had actively communicated this fund to senior leaders of registered providers. Some had successfully applied and were delivering units funded by the scheme. However, there had been a lack of take up. He would very actively encourage providers to apply to this fund.
- 5.3 The Chair thanked the interim Director, Regeneration and invited any initial comments from other guests.
- 5.4 Noting the points around the sales protocol, the Director of Strategic Asset Management, Clarion Housing Group advised that this had worked effectively for Clarion.
- 5.5 The Interim Director, Regeneration agreed with this. The Council was currently in the process of purchasing a Clarion unit, aided by the protocol. He understood that in some cases and within their asset strategies, providers would look to sell stock. However, the Council was committed in these cases to help explore with providers if this sale was required and – if it was – to facilitate maintaining this stock as affordable homes wherever it was possible.
- 5.6 The Partnerships Director, Clarion Housing Group said that one challenge for Clarion in terms of development in Hackney, was availability of land in the required volume and scale.
- 5.7 Clarion had high growth, and would generally only deliver projects which increased its stock numbers by 100 or more. Their research suggested that

- developments in Hackney delivered 160 units on average. This would produce around 50 to 60 affordable Clarion homes, as part of an overall development which would involve partners.
- 5.8 This compared to sites in other areas – including in adjoining boroughs – which provided opportunities for schemes delivering several hundred homes. These fitted with Clarion’s strategies around growth. The challenges around land availability were compounded by the very high market costs in Hackney. He appreciated the Council was delivering developments of significant sizes. However, this was partly made possible by the land assets which it held.
- 5.9 The Chair noted these points. However, she noted from the papers and the points made about the scale of the housing crisis in Hackney, with so many people in need of homes who could not afford open market prices.
- 5.10 Housing associations had roles as social purpose organisations, and she felt it was imperative that all providers did their utmost to deliver new units in a borough which so desperately needed them. She noted that there had not been full take up of the Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge fund. She wished to plead with the providers that they took this up. It would be a tragedy if this funding was lost.
- 5.11 The Commercial & Property Director, One Housing Group agreed on the clear need for affordable housing in Hackney, and One Housing were committed to the borough. He noted points around the Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge fund, and would make contact with the Council around this. This said, land availability and value was an issue in the area. Also, One Housing (and other registered providers) had needed to be more cautious around take up of opportunities through section 106 agreements, as from previous experience there could be a lack of control which providers could have around cost.
- 5.12 He noted the concerns around sales disposals. However, there were sometimes pressures on registered providers to raise funds with which to improve and invest in existing stock. This included pressure from the regulator. There was also a need to ensure a sustainable stock profile. One Housing would always seek to reinvest sales funding in the borough.
- 5.13 The Director of Development, ISHA had recently taken up his post. Hackney was a core borough for ISHA. There were challenges around development, particularly for a small provider. However, ISHA had developed in Hackney, predominantly through section 106 opportunities. They were due to take handover of 8 homes in Hackney Central later this year, and were seeking to redevelop an existing asset to deliver 16 new homes in Alexandra Court. They would welcome partnership working with the Council. Land was an issue.
- 5.14 The Interim Director, Regeneration noted the points made, including challenges around land costs and availability. However, he did see room for better join up between the Council and providers to work through these issues. He felt that the review of the partnership structure could better allow this closer working in order that the opportunities that were there for affordable housing development could be taken up.



- 5.15 The Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership noted the plea of the Chair for more development by Registered Providers in Hackney. Guinness were working to build new homes and to play a full part in helping to address the housing crisis. They were committed to delivering as many homes as was possible, within the financial and policy environment in which they operated and to an extent which did not impact on their ability to keep existing stock safe and of high quality.
- 5.16 A new partnership with Homes England would be seeing the delivery of 4,500 new homes on a national level. In a London context, Guinness were now one of the GLA's Strategic Partners for the delivery of new homes. Guinness would be delivering an additional 1750 affordable homes in the capital over the next five years within this partnership.
- 5.17 He appreciated that Members might be frustrated that only 74 of these units would be delivered in Hackney. This was partly due to the land availability issues mentioned; a larger site in Tower Hamlets was enabling the planned delivery of 1000 homes in that borough. However, Guinness would continue to be committed to development in Hackney where there was opportunity. They hoped that a refresh of the partnership arrangement and the potential introduction of a Compact, could help achieve this.
- 5.18 The Chair thanked the Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership. This said, she noted that of the 74 new homes being delivered within Guinness' regeneration around the Northwold Estate, only 23 would be for social rent, with 36 being made available for open sale.
- 5.19 She appreciated that a further 14 would be shared ownership and there would also be a new community centre. However, she was aware of efforts by Ward Councillors (including Cllr McMahon who was in attendance) to seek to increase the share which social rent took of the total. She felt that there might have been greater explorations by Guinness of the potential to use funds such as the Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge funding to further increase the social rent homes
- 5.20 Cllr McMahon agreed with these points. He appreciated that lower subsidy for affordable housing had brought challenges, and the greater need for cross subsidising affordable homes from sales of others on the market.
- 5.21 However, in meetings with Guinness Partnership's Development Director, both the Council's Director of Regeneration and Ward Councillors had made clear the potential of using the Housing Challenge funding to increase the share of social rented homes within the scheme. The Director of Regeneration had made himself fully available for further discussions on this. He would actively encourage Guinness Partnership to further explore the potential for this with the Council.
- 5.22 The Interim Director, Regeneration thanked the Member. His area could provide a range of support and advice around seeking to maximise the share and numbers of affordable housing units on this scheme and any others. This did include exploring the utilisation of the Housing Challenge Fund. However, it went much further, including advice and support around planning processes, technical aspects around densification, and others.

- 5.23 The Head of External Affairs, Guinness Partnership thanked the Members for these points. This said, it was important to note that Guinness had worked hard to ensure that the new homes delivered through the regeneration were net new homes, half of which were for social rent or shared ownership.
- 5.24 A Member wished to echo the call of the Chair and Officers around the need for take up of the Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge Fund. It was crucial that this was not lost to the borough. She very much hoped that housing association representatives went away and communicated the potential of this fund to their boards and leaders. She hoped that as a result of this meeting there would be greater engagement with the Council around how this funding could be secured and used to deliver affordable homes.
- 5.25 A Member agreed with these points. From points made there appeared to be a focus by Housing associations on sites offering opportunities to deliver higher numbers of homes than the sites available in Hackney. She appreciated that this was understandable, as it might better allow high growth targets to be met and for providers to be able to more rapidly deliver the numbers of homes required within funding arrangements.
- 5.26 However, adapting the approaches to development to the needs and characteristics of an inner city borough like Hackney was vital. The relationships with providers, and their presence in Hackney often went back many years.
- 5.27 Within a commitment to serving the needs of people in the areas they served, she suggested that providers might show greater flexibility by adapting their development approaches to the local context. This included on the types and scales of developments which were viable in the area, and making use of local funding initiatives. This would better evidence the providers continuing to have a localised focus.
- 5.28 She hoped that guests might give a message back to their boards around the need for this local flexibility, and to commit to delivering the greater numbers of smaller developments which could help provide some of the much needed new affordable housing in Hackney.
- 5.29 She had been very pleased that a Peabody scheme in her ward was seeing a greater share of units which would be for social rent, than was initially planned. This was partly due to take up by Peabody of Mayor of Hackney Housing Challenge funding. She welcomed this and hoped to see more examples in future. There had been high amounts of resident concern around Peabody seeking to dispose of some units in the area, but these latest developments had been very welcome.
- 5.30 The Business Development Manager, L&Q, advised that L&Q had scaled back on new development, on a national basis. This said, they supported the Build London Partnership, made up of 23 small housing providers who were keen to expand their stock numbers based on development on small sites. They had funding in place for this, and were in need of sites. She asked that the Council or other partners flagged any land opportunities; for example disused garages or infill sites.

- 5.31 The Chair asked how providers were investing in the borough to ensure stock was in good condition.
- 5.32 The Business Development Manager, L&Q said that a key reason for L&Q halting new development, was to refocus on the safety and quality of its existing stock. They were delivering significant fire safety work.
- 5.33 The Director of Strategic Asset Management, Clarion Housing Group noted that the paper provided by Clarion detailed the investment in Clarion's Hackney stock over 2021 - 2023. The programme would be informed by the findings of a detailed stock condition survey which was now complete.
- 5.34 Moving forward, Clarion was developing a new approach around setting a new standard for all homes by 2040, based around key aspects including safety and sustainability. She would welcome the opportunity to present more detailed plans as they developed, including around what this would mean for the Asset Management Strategy and planned investment in relation to Hackney.
- 5.35 She said that greater levels of data from the Council could help Clarion and other providers set Asset Management Plans which were more informed by the local context. This included detail around sites and areas which might be most suitable for densification and therefore development, and around the levels and nature of housing need in the area to better enable planning. Sometimes providers needed to rely on their own research around these aspects, which was sometimes limited. She would welcome the Council providing greater information.
- 5.36 The Director of Customer Service Operations, Guinness Partnership said that the moves of providers to reinvest in compliance and safety of their homes, had brought pressures on the ability to invest elsewhere, including in development. This was common across the sector. The fast developing sustainability agenda would also be likely to bring significant cost implications.
- 5.37 The Head of Housing, Sanctuary agreed with the trend of greater investment in compliance works. Sanctuary had invested significantly in fire and electrical works. This said, there had also been significant investment in the last year focused on estate stock, including on widows, boilers and lifts.
- 5.38 Asked to give any closing comments, the Interim Director Regeneration felt the discussions had been very useful. It had helped highlight a range of issues around lettings and development. He felt that it had given further support to the need for partnership arrangements to be reviewed. There was a clear need for the Council and providers to work together to consider the assets which they held across the piece and how they could be used to best support residents. Noting the points around the need for greater sharing of information and data, his area would welcome working with providers to achieve a greater common understanding of housing needs and wider housing issues in Hackney.

## **6 Minutes of meeting 14th January 2020**

- 6.1 The minutes of the meeting 14<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

- 6.2 The Chair reminded Members that the 14<sup>th</sup> January was called following a mains burst on Thames Water's network in October 2019, which had caused major flooding in the N4 area of the borough.
- 6.3 The meeting had explored the cause of the burst, the response of Thames Water, and Thames Water's general performance in managing its network.
- 6.3 During the meeting, there had also been discussions on Thames Water's responses to two previous, separate mains burst floods in Hackney – particularly that in the Lea Bridge Ward in 2018.
- 6.4 The Chair advised Members that further to the meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January, Thames Water had made a written submission to her. They had requested that this was considered at the point that the minutes from the meeting were being reviewed.
- 6.5 This statement was intended to seek to address points made in the meeting, which Thames Water reported as having been factually incorrect. These were around Thames Water not having taken up the Council's offer of training in emergency responses following the flood in Lea Bridge, and around a lack of support by Thames Water for a resident effected by that flood.
- 6.6 The Chair said she would read out the statement.
- 6.7 However, before she did so she wished to advise that Council Officers did not recognise Thames Water's understanding that Thames Water had been advised by the Council that the training aspect was not required.
- 6.8 From further dialogue with Thames Water, she advised that its understanding that this was the case appeared to be based on an email exchange between a Council Officer and Thames Water. However, Council Officers had noted that this this email regarded a separate matter (a debrief following the incident) and not the offer of training made by the Council nor the view of both Officers and Members Thames Water could benefit from this
- 6.9 The Chair read out the statement below, from Steve Spencer (Chief Operating Officer, Thames Water):

*Dear Councillor Patrick*

*Thank you for inviting us to the 'The Living in Hackney' Scrutiny meeting on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January at Parkwood Primary School. I was pleased that we were able to give our account of the flooding events in Queen's Drive and Leigh Bridge Road and hope the evidence we provided will lead to some positive recommendations for both Hackney Council and Thames Water.*

*I have looked into some specific points raised during the session as I feel they were not accurately represented and would now like to clarify our position on these matters:*

*It was stated at the meeting, that following the Lea Bridge flood in 2018, Thames Water had declined to follow up offers from Hackney Council to work together on*

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*training for similar emergency events that might happen in the future. Having reviewed e-mail correspondence between Hackney Council and our Emergency Risk and Business Resilience Specialist, I can advise that we did indeed contact Hackney Council but the officers confirmed that they were happy with our current procedures and a follow up meeting was not required. To that end, we left our contact details should the situation change and offered to remain open to any training that might be deemed appropriate.*

*A point was also raised criticising our care of a resident affected by the Lea Bridge Road burst stating it was less than acceptable. You should by now have received our response addressed to Councillor Patrick regarding this resident. The response outlines our position, but to summarise:*

- Or Insurance Claim Handlers were in direct contact with the customer, throughout their journey with us. Following the event in October 2018, alternative accommodations was immediately arranged with appropriate facilities, which the tenants refused, preferring to stay with the damaged property.*
- With the Housing Associations support (Clarion) the residents eventually accepted alternative accommodation and we worked with Clarion to rectify damage to the property. All remedial work was agreed with Clarion directly and completed through Clarion's own channels*
- However, when the residents moved back into their home, they insisted the quality of the refurbishment was not up to standard. Our own repair contractors reviewed the work, to support the residents and advised there were issues with some items, which had not been fully resolved by Clarion. We then rectified these issues in an effort to support the customer*
- Further to this, an external water leak on private pipework, not connected with our business was causing water ingress into the apartment. We continuously brought this to Clarion's attention, but it was not fixed. We therefore, arranged for the leak to be repaired to again support the tenant*
- All repair work at the property has now been completed and the tenant is satisfied with the final result.*

*Regarding the question about our oldest pipe in service on our records, I can confirm that these date back to 1802 and are near to New River Head and straddle Islington and Camden.*

*As we have not yet had sight of the minutes from the meeting I would ask that these points are reflected in the public record when they are published. Nikki Hines from our Government Liaison team will be happy to work with Thomas Thorne on the finalising on the minutes if this is helpful.*

*Kind regards*

*Steve Spencer*

6.10 Cllr Rathbone thanked the Chair. He firstly noted the clarification from Council Officers that the basis of Thames Water's understanding that the Council had

confirmed that training was not required, was the content of an email regarding a separate matter.

6.11 He then sought to address the points of the response in regards to the support provided to an affected resident. He said that it was telling in his view that the response appeared not to give consideration or regard to the psychological effect that such a disaster could have on vulnerable people in particular, as he had mentioned at the end of the January meeting. He did not wish to discuss the intricacies of any particular case in this meeting. However, it was absolutely the case that the resident concerned had been devastated by the flooding, and had not yet been supported to be back in the position she was before it.

6.12 The Chair thanked Cllr Rathbone. She suggested that the Commission again write to Thames Water regarding the specific case, and also on the extent of any wider care and support which Thames Water offered to people emotionally affected by incidents it was responsible for. For her part she noted that the statement suggested that she should have received a separate response on the matter. She was yet to receive this, and she would use this latest letter to flag this.

## **7 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2019/20 Work Programme**

7.1 The work programme was noted.

## **8 Terms of Reference - Exploring the work of Housing Associations in Hackney Review - item to note**

8.1 The terms of reference had been agreed in the last meeting but had been included here to make them a matter of public record. They were noted.

## **9 Any Other Business**

9.1 There was no other business.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.50 pm