

TAG Love Lane Meeting with Haringey Fairness Commission

14th December 2018

Present:

- 5 members of Love Lane TAG
- Cllr Zena Brabazon, Co-Chair of Haringey Fairness Commission
- Professor Paul Watt, Co-Chair of Haringey Fairness Commission
- Reverend Paul Nicolson, Taxpayers against Poverty and Commissioner
- Lucy Fisher, Policy & Equalities Officer, Haringey Council

Introduction:

- At the start of the meeting, Love Lane Temporary Accommodation Group (TAG) members expressed general positivity around the fact that the Fairness Commission is happening. One member of the group observed that the public event on 1st November seemed 'a bit too organised' at first, but it did prove to be an opportunity for people to vocalise the issues they're facing. However, the group had some scepticism and wanted to know what weight the Fairness Commission actually carries, and what power it has to take action around the issues raised through it.
- The Co-Chairs responded that the Fairness Commission was commissioned by the Council, as a result of a manifesto commitment by the Labour Party. While the Commission can't act of its own accord, it will make recommendations to the Council that the Commissioners will have to own, and which the Council will be expected to respond to.
- It was explained that the Fairness Commission will ultimately be focusing on a few priority areas that are explored in greater depth in the later phases of the programme. The Commission cannot say at this stage whether the issues raised by Love Lane will be a focus of the Commission, but the testimony, together with everything else the commission hears, will be important to help the Commission select the focus areas.
- While there are currently limitations on councils due to money, the Co-Chairs highlighted that this doesn't mean meaningful changes can't be made – e.g. improving communication and strengthening relationships with residents. One TAG member raised the point that by the time the Commission ends they could be being decanted from Love Lane. The evidence from Love Lane – with their permission – will also be shared with the Haringey Council Housing Strategy and Commissioning Team, so they are informed about the conversation. The Housing team work to: deliver the new homes that Haringey needs; prevent and reduce homelessness; and drive up the quality of housing for everyone).
- Another TAG member gave a summary of the group's current situation. He said the focus for the group is on how unfairly people have been treated, and the impact this is having on entire families.
- Over the course of the conversation, there were six clear issues that the group said they were dealing with as a result of their situation:
 1. An ongoing lack of transparency around their status and the status of the estate;
 2. Being treated by the Council as disposable;
 3. Lack of basic upkeep of the estate;
 4. Living through demolition in the surrounding area;
 5. General experiences of living in temporary accommodation;
 6. The psychological, physical, and emotional impact of the above.

A summary of the group's comments around each point is below.

1. An ongoing lack of transparency around their status and the status of the estate:

- The majority of the group say that when they got their tenancies they weren't told that this was a demolition site. One member of the group says that when the Housing Officer told him he was being moved to Love Lane and he commented that it was a demolition site, the officer got defensive and said if you don't take the tenancy I'll discharge you.
- The groups say that some tenants at Love Lane still don't know that it's being demolished and are finding out from neighbours.
- Love Lane TAG say they have had an ongoing lack of clarity around what their position is, and about what is happening on the site, e.g. if and when the blocks will be demolished, how many new homes are being created, when there will be a ballot and whether and when they could be moved on?
- It has taken a long time for the group to get confirmation that the Council was knowingly putting temporary accommodation tenants into the demolition site with the intention that they would not have a secure tenancy on the new site when it is built.
 - *'There is a lack of clarity around how many homes are being created. They talk about 2,500 new homes, but how many of them will be social rent on Love Lane?'*
- The group hear conflicting news about what is going to happen. They say that officers have said to some other people in the TAG that the new homes are going to be for them, but the TAG itself hasn't been given these updates. They recognise that there are some things officers might not be able to let out at the moment because things are so unfinalized, but the group feels like it's been left in the dark and there are things they should know.
 - *'It's frustrating and difficult when you don't know who's telling the truth.'*
- The group also report that representatives from Lendlease/High Road West have told them more than once that however many homes the Council wants, Lendlease can provide them at a reasonable cost per unit. But then Council officers come in and say that's not the case.

2. Being treated by the Council as disposable:

- The group feel that when trying to tell people at Haringey Council what it's like on Love Lane they get brushed off, with Council officers seeming unwilling to take on the issues that are raised. The group wants Haringey Council to take control of the situation, and to recognise that it was a mistake to put them into the estate.
- The group are unclear about the status of the ballot – they understand it is not legally binding and their sense is that 'Haringey Council will do what they want at the end of the day.' The understanding they have is that if they oppose the demolition, then the Council will re-house the whole estate with secure tenants.
 - *'Behind every door we walk through there's nothing. We have the power to influence the decision, but nothing to gain from it.'*
- At one point, TAG emailed the Council a list of questions, and they took eight months to respond. They were important questions – what's going to happen after demolition, etc? And the sense was that they only got a response to those questions in the end because they met with the Leader, who followed it up.
- The group said they have been excluded from meetings relating to Love Lane that they feel they should have been involved in. They have the sense that their Independent Tenant and Leaseholder Advisor (ITLA) is not impartial, because they're being paid by the Council, and they've not been inclusive, e.g. they've had meetings with Spurs that Love Lane TAG hasn't

been invited to. There is a question around whether Haringey could potentially manage that relationship in a way that is more transparent and feels more impartial.

3. Lack of basic upkeep of the estate:

- Because Love Lane is a demolition site, the group say it's not being properly maintained, reporting broken windows around the estate, broken lights, broken doors and dirty stairwells. In addition to this, there is a serious damp/mould problem particularly in Charles, Ermine and Moselle House. TAG has seen multiple instances where this problem is causing serious harm to residents' health and well-being, contributing to an unsafe environment.
- While the group highlighted that the issues around maintenance are secondary to the issue of how they've been treated generally, the point was made that residents are paying rent and a service charge, which should cover the cost of these things.
 - *'When it rains the lights go out at night for an hour and a half or more. It's a problem in the cables. You're going into the foyer in CF and you go up and it's black. It's very dangerous. I've got used to it but it's not nice, you're always looking behind you... We're living in those conditions because it's a regen site and we shouldn't have to. We're all paying our rent and service charges. We shouldn't be living in that but we are, we're living in constant worry. As adults we're dealing with it but we're transferring that to our families.'*

4. Living through demolition in the surrounding area:

- Besides the lack of upkeep on the estate, the group say that the noise and disruption of the demolition going on around them has been extremely unpleasant to live through. They feel frustrated that as soon as the area is liveable again, they will be moved on as they have no security as temporary tenants.
- The group think it would be fair for the Council to give them a permanent lease at social rent, to make up for what they've had to endure while they've been on the site and to counteract the number of homeless households that Haringey Council has to address.
 - *'We've been under 24/7 noise. The whole estate.'*
 - *'We've had to endure the lack of security, we've had to survive that whole demolition – the station being built, the stadium being built, the High Road changing all around us. We were brought in here just to help this phase go through smoothly. That's not fair.'*
 - *'I honestly think we've earned the right to have a permanent lease at social rent in the new development, or a permanent lease at social rent elsewhere in Tottenham or Haringey, simply because of that mistake Haringey made to put us into these conditions.'*

5. General experiences of living in temporary accommodation:

- The issue around being disposable goes wider than just Love Lane. Members of the group had all been moved a number of times by the Council in a matter of years, some while pregnant and with young children.
- Besides being moved around, the group described other challenges in relation to living in temporary accommodation. The group said that the reality is that the Council often offers properties without having seen them, and that if they refuse them then they're made homeless. This has led to people they know living in properties with bad damp.

- One family described their experiences of living in a hostel with their daughter, and they had to share bathrooms and toilets with no locks on with younger, single men and people who hadn't been DBS checked.
 - *'That's what's the main factor, is the uncertainty of it all. You can't move on, it's there all the time. Is [the next move] going to be in the area, out the area, are you going to have to change schools, work. That's one of the hardest things to live with.'*
- As temporary tenants, the group feels that it is generally more difficult to vie for a voice. They have needs that are very different to those of leaseholders, and at Love Lane in particular it feels that their interests were not prioritised, and as if TAG was being held back from having more of a say. As an example, TAG wanted a list of the TA tenants at Love Lane so they could knock on their doors and organise themselves, but the RA wouldn't give them that. In addition to this TAG later discovered the RA's Chair had a list of Leaseholders, which was used to organise a separate Leaseholder's group.

6. The psychological impact:

- The group felt strongly that the human cost of housing people in demolition sites like Love Lane isn't properly considered, and they've seen the negative impact that it's had on their families and neighbours.
- All members of the group said that what they'd been through had impacted them or their families negatively. This places additional anxiety on them, as they worry about the impact it will have later down the line.
 - *'I'm keeping an eye on my kids, but we never know how this is going to affect them. I can see 100% why kids turn... The kids on that estate, they have to go through that, and the fight they have to go through to try and keep straight, it's hard.'*
 - *'It's people's lives that are in the balance. That's why we're dealing with a lot of stress, a lot of depression.'*
 - *'We've been put through a lot, to be moved on again is unfairness. For my kids to go through that is damaging. Can you imagine being put on a demolition site with newborns, it's awful.'*