

Written evidence submitted by High Path Community Association [RSH 092]

Much has been discussed over the past few months about 'social housing' given the investigative reporting by the media channel, ITV and its reporter, Daniel Hewitt.

The residents of the High Path Community Association (HPCA), of the High Path estate, Wimbledon, London, SW19, are living in similar circumstances, and can markedly relate to the cases highlighted by Mr Hewitt, in numerous instances. On this basis we are requesting that this written evidence be regarded as an essential document for this topic and that we be invited to give oral evidence to the committee as our plight is a testament of how social housing, when mismanaged, can go inexplicably wrong.

Our example can be addressed across all noted points of reference in the call for evidence, however for the sake of brevity we will focus on:

What is the impact on social housing providers' resources, and therefore their ability to maintain and improve their housing stock, of the need to remediate building safety risks and retrofit their homes to make them more energy efficient?

Introduction to HPCA for reference

The [High Path Community Association](#) is the constituted group for the residents of the High Path estate in Wimbledon, SW19, London. Instead of going with convention and naming ourselves a 'residents' association' we opted to draw in the affected locality of the area too, thereby allying ourselves with the businesses and other community groups (e.g. the local church and youth groups) too.

The estate has 654 homes on the estate, of mixed tenure (leaseholders, freeholders and social tenants) of which it mainly consists of 'social tenants'.

What is the impact on social housing providers' resources, and therefore their ability to maintain and improve their housing stock, of the need to remediate building safety risks and retrofit their homes to make them more energy efficient?

In 2010 the bulk of the 'social housing' stock of the London Borough of Merton was transferred to the housing association, known as, 'Circle'. The name of the housing association changed to 'Merton Priory' to reflect a localised aspect due to the historical site 'Merton Priory' in the neighbouring ward, 'Abbey'. This is an important point to reflect upon because in the intervening years since this transfer the name of the housing association has changed several times such as, 'Circle Merton Priory Homes' (CMPH) and again since the merger with the housing association 'Affinity Sutton', to the latest incarnation called, 'Clarion'.

Residents living under 'Clarion's charge are therefore confused: who is Clarion and what do they represent?

Residents to this year, 2021, still relay to the 'council' as their first port of call, when reporting 'repairs and maintenance', instead of the housing association, so persistent is the confusion.

The point of the transfer of the stock of housing was because the local authority (Merton) was unable to provide regular maintenance to the homes and the reason given was because the funding from central government was not sufficient enough to sustain the work required to the homes.

Whilst an element of this is true (smaller receipts from central government) the mismanagement of the parties concerned i.e. the housing department of the local authority and respective contractors, meant that workmanship was consistently poor and communication between resident and housing department was woeful.

Astonishingly, the transfer of stock also incorporated the transfer of staff (TUPE) and crucially the same incompetent personnel at the local authority were then made in charge of the homes of the borough, however under a different guise.

After the first two to three years of operation it became apparent that Circle's ability in sustaining the homes of the borough were lack lustre and [corrupt](#).

The Chairperson of our group has engaged extensively with all stakeholders involved in the local community (residents/councillors/MP) and in 2014 was made Chairperson for Circle's, Customer Engagement panel – Repairs and Maintenance. At the time of his position, it was noted that many faults were at play in the everyday management of CMPH, for example:

- The contact centre's staff were often terse and abrasive when dealing with residents' concerns
- 'Job numbers' were inconsistently given to residents during the telephone calls, which meant that if (as was often the case) a contractor failed to turn up, there was no record of the initial telephone call reporting the case, therefore the journey had to be repeated frequently to complete the 'repairs' case.
- Senior members of staff had job titles applied to their roles, despite not being suitable qualified for such positions. 'Surveyor' was one such title. (we are able to supply evidence of this to the LUHC committee from the minutes of the Customer Engagement panel meetings).

CHMP were supposed to be the 'knight in shining armour' in our hour of need – damp and condensation was rife on the estate and they even enlisted an actor of the locally filmed 'The Bill' in a media campaign to sell the idea to residents that they were the best placed organisation to look after our homes, under the project, the 'Decent Homes' programme. But little did we know that the organisation had a [culture of bullying](#) which in turn was projected to the residents.

It meant that workmanship was poor, contractors (and sub-contractors) were under pressure and disingenuous about the organisation and even to this day (with Engie, United Living et al at the helm) moral is very low.

Councillors of all political colours and of all wards are consistently having to refer to the council's respective departments and to the housing association, cases whereby residents are having to live in squalor and this has now meant that instead of retrofitting to a suitable standard ([whole house approach](#)) both the housing association and council have opted to regenerate three estates mainly affected by this neglect: High Path, Eastfields and Ravensbury.

Repairs and maintenance is secondary and the primary objective is 'regeneration' and even this still not carried out with the residents' concerns uppermost in mind.

The residents that occupy positions on the housing associations' board are complicit in the damage that is ongoing and we are sad to report are merely sycophants in their scheme to 'land-grab' and devolve projects that are not designed or led by residents, but by 'out of touch' architects and 'ego-driven' managers considering promotion or retirement within the housing association.

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