

**(DRAFT) Minutes of the Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Panel
3rd November 2014**

Present: Cllr Adje, Cllr Bevan, Cllr Carroll, Cllr Elliot and Cllr Engert.

In attendance: Cllr Demirci, Cllr Mallett, and Cllr Newton

Officers: Stephen Kelly, John McGrath, Charlotte Pommery and Nick Walkley.

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Marshall.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 None received.

3. Deputations

3.1 None received.

4. Urgent Business

4.1 It was agreed that the panel would consider the implications for social housing of an amendment to a report considered by Regulatory Committee (Local Plan Making) on the 15th January 2015. This would be taken at the beginning of the agenda.

Local Plan Making - proportion of social housing within proposed developments

4.2 The AD for Planning provided a background to the item under discussion. A number of amendments were proposed to the Local Plan, which would then proceed to consultation. One of the proposed amendments within this report was to change the proportion of new homes which should be affordable in larger scale developments (10 units+) from 50% to 40%. Although this was rejected by Regulatory Committee, Cabinet chose to include this within the overall consultation on amendments as the entire plan could be jeopardised and hold up planned developments in the pipeline.

4.3 The reasoning behind the proposed change was that the proposed reduction would increase the viability of local development for developers and increase the total supply of housing, and by extension, affordable housing. It was also noted that this level would also be comparable to other targets set in other boroughs (30% Croydon, 35% in Greenwich, 40% in Lambeth, 40% in Hammersmith and Fulham).

4.4 It was also noted that legal opinion had been sought, and that maintaining the 50% target for the proportion of affordable homes in new development is not viable through analysis of local evidence, and may be susceptible to policy challenge (as developers may make the case that this figure is too high for a viable development). Such a challenge may also delay or jeopardise planned or current development proposals.

- 4.5 The Panel noted that this was a Cabinet decision for which a consultation was planned over a 6 week period. It was agreed that the outcome of this consultation would be reported to the Panel.

Agreed: Outcome of the Consultation for Local Plan Making (Local Plan) would be reported to HRSP.

5.0 Cabinet Q & A

- 5.1 The Cabinet Member for Planning attended to respond to questions from the panel relating to his portfolio of services. A summary of the main areas of questioning are presented below.

- 5.2 The panel discussed the number of agency and temporary staff within the planning service, where it was perceived that the high levels of such staff reduced the responsiveness of the service to the public and members alike. It was noted that given the high levels of planned development across the capital, there was a significant demand for experienced planning officers and that many other services were finding it hard to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff.

- 5.3 It was noted that there were plans to restructure the planning service over the coming months although such plans were in an early stage, and that consultation with Unions was planned. Until such preliminary consultations had been undertaken it would be difficult to share these plans with the panel at present.

Agreed: That a briefing for plans to restructure the Planning Service would be provide to the panel (once formal consultation with staff and Unions had taken place) and would include objectives of reorganisation, timescales for delivery and special reference to the use of agency and other temporary staff.

- 5.4 The panel noted that the quality of experiences with planning staff varied, yet there was no mechanism to feedback either good or bad reports. It was reported that members should feedback their experience, good or bad, directly to the Assistant Director. It should be borne in mind however, that staff within the service have experienced a significant increase in workloads and are under pressure.

- 5.5 Within a broader discussion of planning service recruitment it was noted that almost half of planning schools had closed and that there were not enough planning officers graduating, which was contributing to recruitment pressures. Planning services were therefore having to recruit from other non-traditional areas with similar skill sets. It was felt that the current job descriptions were not helpful in that they were too rigid and prescriptive to accommodate a wider recruitment policy.

Cabinet member – verbal update

- 5.6 The Cabinet member provided an update on key issues within his portfolio.

- **Selective Licensing:** it was noted that similar proposals in Enfield had been successfully challenged in respect of the consultation undertaken. It was also suggested that Newham may also be subject to further legal challenge. This underlined the need to develop the evidence base in Haringey to make a strong case for its implementation and to learn from other boroughs.

- **Transport Strategy:** The current strategy is 14 years old and needs to be updated, particularly as there is no walking, cycling or public transport strategy within it. This will take time to develop the evidence base and to present to Cabinet for approval (probably in July 2015).

Agreed: details of the Transport Strategy would be presented to scrutiny (Environment & Community Safety)

- **Neighbourhood Plans:** these are continuing to be developed and officers are working with key local stakeholders to develop these.
- **Development Management:** A number of site development plans were at the pre-application stage and were moving forward these included Alexander Palace, Tottenham Regeneration and Highgate Magistrates Court.
- **Fees and Charges:** a new structure for planning fees and charged would be considered by Cabinet in February. A new paid for advice service would be introduced which it was hoped would reduce the failure rate of small developments. It is hoped that this would also increase the timeliness, quality and effectiveness of advice provided.
- **Enforcement:** it was acknowledged that there is an officer shortage as one officer has been moved to Industrial Living Project. It was acknowledged that there is the potential to train and up-skill community members and stakeholders in respect of some aspects of enforcement processes.

5.7 The panel raised concerns about the number of planning applications that had to be withdrawn because these had not been set up correctly by planning officers, in some instances, applications had progressed to consultation and responses had been received. It was noted that the service is providing support to developers and that new fees and charges structure will improve the quality and accountability of advice.

5.8 It was noted that a report on Public Rights of Way would be published in the near future setting out the accessibility of walking routes across the borough.

5.9 The panel raised concerns about the level of staffing support in Planning Conservation and whether additional resources could be placed within this aspect of the planning service. It was noted that although no additional staff could be provided at this time, a new independent Chair had been appointed to the Design Review Panel, a service which would be cost neutral. It is anticipated that this will contribute to the overall quality of schemes being brought forward and funded through fees and charges.

5.10 The Chair thanked the Cabinet member and Assistant Director for Planning for attending the meeting.

6. Minutes

6.1 The minutes of meetings held 3rd November 2014 and 10th December 2014 were considered by the panel. In respect of the former, it was noted that there was an outstanding action in respect of the performance of local Registered Housing Provider (RHP).

Action: Scrutiny Officer to follow up with officers within the Enablement Team.

6.2 Minutes of both meetings were agreed.

7. Asset Management Plan 2014-2018

7.1 The panel noted that the Asset Management Plan 2014-2018 was a comprehensive plan for all of the Councils physical assets including housing, schools, and community buildings. The Plan:

- Outlines the priorities, actions and projects that will support improved performance in the management of the Councils property portfolio;
- Provides a performance update on previous plans;
- Provides a long term strategy for the management of council owned assets.

7.2 The panel noted that the Asset Management Plan will link to the Capital Asset Strategy, but as this is still in development, the current plan should be considered as draft. Both of these strategies would be aligned to the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

7.3 The panel noted that in the context of reduced central grant funding, the Capital Asset Strategy would be important as this would set out future potential income/ revenue options from Council assets (and extend financial choices available to members). The Asset Strategy was expected to go to Cabinet in July but a draft of this would be presented to scrutiny before.

Agreed: The draft Capital Asset Strategy would be presented to scrutiny prior to Cabinet in summer 2015.

7.4 The panel noted key achievements to date which have included:

- Through Smart Working, reduced the number of administration buildings from 24 to 11 (8 occupied and 3 awaiting disposal);
- Targeting a reduction in running costs on administration buildings by 30%;
- Sale of £66.5m in property assets;
- £180m spent on transforming the secondary education estate;
- Leased the Council's crematorium and cemeteries to Dignity; and
- Leased the Council's leisure centres to Fusion.

7.5 A summary of key discussion points from the panel is provided below:

- Commercial shops and property - a detailed review of very single property has been undertaken as of January 2015. This information will be analysed, with input from health, housing, education and regeneration to ensure that the range of potential opportunities for properties is undertaken;
- Community buildings - a report will go to Cabinet in July;
- Housing – a condition survey is currently being undertaken;
- Administrative buildings - these have been reduced from 24 to 11, these will be kept under review and aligned to corporate plans;
- Libraries - there was a manifesto commitment to maintain all libraries.

- 7.6 The panel noted that whilst Decent Homes monies had been used to upgrade housing, it was noted that commercial properties which were part of the same development had not been similarly improved, particularly the rear gardens of these properties.
- 7.7 The panel questioned plans to dispose of the Red House (a former nursing home for the elderly) in West Green, when there was such high demand for housing in the borough and could be put to other uses (e.g. temporary accommodation). The panel noted that there were many legal and planning restrictions around the use of such buildings for temporary accommodation. In addition, some properties would just too expensive to bring back in to use.

8. Community Buildings

- 8.1 A report was submitted to the panel on the strategic assessment of community building that had been undertaken to date in line with a Cabinet report and agreement in December 2012. It was noted that this work had included a physical assessment of each of the 31 buildings together with an assessment of the current community uses. The review has looked at:
- Lease arrangements
 - Rent levels
 - Condition survey
 - Organisations using each building
 - Community impact of services offered from each.
- 8.2 The panel noted that some community buildings were used exclusively by certain community groups, and were not accessible to others. The panel were of the view that the review of community buildings should reinstate the principles that such buildings are community assets and where possible, should be open access and open to use by all community groups in that locality.
- 8.3 It was noted that given the individual circumstances of each community building (e.g. the lease arrangements etc), these had being assessed individually and where appropriate, action taken. In this context, it was noted that there were plans to introduce new management to the Chestnuts Community Centre to ensure that this building was being let for the use of the community.
- 8.4 The panel noted that a final report would go to Cabinet in July 2015. The panel recommended that ward members should be involved in the final assessments and recommendations for each of the Community Buildings.

9. Panel Project - Council led development

- 9.1 The panel noted that the first evidence gathering session had been held in December 2014, and had heard evidence from council officers to establish local policy and practice in respect of council led development. In this context, the panel heard from:
- Enablement team
 - Planning Policy team
 - Finance team

9.2 The panel noted that future sessions would be arranged to hear evidence from other local authorities in respect of their development plans and the legal and financial instruments used to support these. It was noted that Ealing, Barking & Dagenham and Camden had already agreed to attend a future evidence gathering session.

10. Work programme Update

10.1 The panel noted that there was one further meeting planned in March and the agreed agenda for this. The panel also discussed and noted council forward plan.

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