

MINUTES OF MEETING HOUSING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON Tuesday, 13th October, 2015, 18.30.

PRESENT:

Councillors: Eugene Akwasi-Ayisi (Chair) Gail Engert, Tim Gallagher, Eddie Griffith, Emine Ibrahim and Martin Newton

14. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein.

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Gunes.

16. URGENT BUSINESS

None received.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

18. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

The panel noted that a question had been received from a member of the public to be presented to the Cabinet Member for Planning at item 7. Although not received within the required notification period, the Chair agreed to allow this question and the Cabinet member had been given prior notification.

19. MINUTES

19.1 In respect of actions arising from the last meeting it was noted that:

- Details of the estate infill programme had been circulated to members;
- The panel had undertaken the planned visit to APEX House;
- Selective licensing; older peoples housing and Haringey Housing Strategy have been incorporated in to the panels work programme;
- The panels work on the Community Infrastructure Levy had been scoped (see item 11).

19.2 In respect of outstanding items it was noted that the panel would:

Agreed:

- To write to Cllr Sahota in respect of work being undertaken within local high streets;
- To write to Chief Officer for Homes for Haringey and Director for Regeneration to provide a report on empty homes and how they are brought back in to use.

19.3 In respect of 8.4 the wording should read 'time table'.

19.4 in respect of the RAG ratings for priority boards it was noted that these would soon be going live before the end of the month. This would allow greater oversight of the performance of the corporate priorities and would be in a new accessible and interactive format.

6.5 The minutes were agreed.

20. CABINET MEMBER Q & A

20.1 The Cabinet member for Planning outlined some of the key planning documents on which the Planning Service was currently focused:

- Development Management;
- Site Allocations;
- Tottenham Area Action Plan;
- Wood Green Area Action Plan.

20.2 It was also reported that in respect of planning applications all majors and 83% of minor planning decisions were on track and within planning timeframes. This is significant progress, especially in respect of major planning applications. It was also noted that a number of major applications totalling in excess of £1billion are currently being dealt with within the service, these include:

- Tottenham Hotspur Football Club;
- Apex House;
- Bruce Grove Station;
- Tottenham Hale - Hale Wharf and Techno Park.

20.3 Building control was performing well with a high demand for this service, which was indicative of quality of service on offer given that local residents can go to any provider for this service. The panel also noted that Tottenham Hotspur were using this in house service which provided a further vote of confidence.

20.4 Other key issues to note in the planning service included:

- Highgate Neighbourhood Plan engagement was still ongoing;
- Crouch End Neighbourhood Forum has been submitted and was being prepared for consideration by Cabinet in December;
- The joint local authority waste plan (North London Waste Authority) consultation closed and the borough has submitted its own comments;

- The Noel Park Area Conservation Plan had been well received by the community, with positive comments from Historic England and is due to be considered by Cabinet in November;

20.5 The panel also raised a number of issues with the Cabinet member and senior officers and a summary of the main of the main discussion points is provided below. It was noted that recruitment and retention of **planning staff** remained a significant issue for Haringey and indeed, other London boroughs. A substantive increase in the volume of development had continued to lead to nationwide shortages of planning staff.

20.6 It was reported to the panel that the planning service has recently consulted on a restructure for the planning service. A key aim of this restructure was to help retained staff to progress and develop within the organisation, but also to help recruit and retain young graduates who will be provided with development support within the service.

20.7 It was reported to the panel that a Team Leader for the east of the borough had been recruited and replaces a historically vacant post which has been filled by an agency planner. Deputies are also being recruited to these posts. A key aim of these appointments is to build relationships within these areas, which is much easier to do with permanent appointments.

20.8 Staffing remains a major challenge however, as the local authority is not only competing against other planning services for well qualified planning officers, but also with the private sector, who in general, can offer much more lucrative packages than public sector employers. The service has also held discussions with Human Resources to explore the possibility of recruiting from outside London and the incentives which may support this.

20.9 The panel also discussed whether the perception of Haringey was possible influence on recruitment or were judgements to apply for posts here based solely on pay and conditions. It was noted that the a benchmarking exercise had revealed that pay for team leader roles was substantially below London average and the restructure has sought to address that.

20.10 The panel discussed the Haringey proposition, the local offer to attract planning officers. It was clear that perceptions were changing and with the advent of major planning decisions to be taken within the service (e.g. Tottenham Hotspur, High Road West, Cross Rail 2, Wood Green) these could add additional kudos and appeal to working in the service.

20.11 It was noted that the solution to staff and recruitment and retention issues was likely to be a long-term and would require further work on the supply side of this equation, in particular the creation of local education and training opportunities.

20.12 In times of high demand for planning officers, the impact of recruitment agencies on local pay and condition can be significant in that agency staff working may be in receipt of a premium rate over and above local rates. As a consequence, it was not uncommon to report that there are examples where agency staff are earning

more than managers. In this context, the ability for local authorities to recruit and retain permanent staff is further inhibited.

20.13 At present, the panel noted that there are more temporary and agency staff than there are permanent staff in the department. Exit interviews would suggest that for many, financial considerations are of paramount importance, particularly in relation to the high cost of living in London (e.g. housing). As a consequence, a lot of time is spent listening to junior planners to identify future aspirations and how these can be met, within the organisation.

20.14 the panel also discussed the councils performance in respect of **planning appeals**, and the proportion of decisions which were allowed and disallowed. It was noted that currently, the council has won 64% of planning appeals, and the performance of local planning services are published by the DCLG every quarter.

20.15 In respect of outcomes of appeals, overall performance is reported to Regulatory Committee and the outcomes are reported on the planning service website. In respect of appeals performance, it was noted that Haringey is in line with London average. The panel noted that planning was currently a very dynamic policy field which may impact on both the nature and volume of planning appeals going forward.

Agreed: (1) Planning appeal performance and outcome information would be sent to members. (2) That local analysis of planning appeal outcomes to assist in the identification of any patterns or trends would be provided to the panel.

20.16 The panel discussed the **Crouch End Neighbourhood Forum** and noted that there have been ongoing discussions with the group, including comments on the draft bid. There is only one application expected for this area which will make things more straight forward and the planning service have been meeting with the shadow forum to assess their expectations for the area. This report is expected to be considered at Cabinet in November.

20.17 **Starter Homes** are expected to be included within the new Housing & Planning Bill (published 13th October). The bill will promote the development of Starter Homes, available to qualifying first-time-buyers at a discount of at least 20% less than the market value and Councils will have a specific duty to promote the supply of Starter Homes (including the preparation of local plans). The full ramifications of this section has yet to be fully assessed, but this could have a substantial impact in the way the council delivers affordable housing.

20.18 It was noted that budget reductions to be implemented within the consultation budget in 2016/17 would result in fewer consultation letters being distributed as a part of the planning consultation process. In preparation for this, the **Statement of Community Involvement** has been updated and is due to be agreed by Full Council early in 2016. Early indications are that people are already transferring on-line and other channels of communication are being explored. It should be noted that consultation is not being reduced just that different mediums of consultation will be used.

20.19 There was a broad discussion of the role of members of the public at **Planning Committee**. The panel voiced concerns that members of the public attending planning committee can sometimes feel that their opinion is not valued or worthwhile in considering planning applications as this invariably overridden by planning officer or legal advice. Whilst accepting that there are specific grounds on which applications can be challenged, the panel were of the view the rejection of such comments could be undertaken more sensitively. Given the narrow confines through which to influence planning applications at this stage of the planning process, the panel questioned whether there is a better way of involving the public at the Planning Committee.

20.20 The panel noted that by the time that an application comes to Planning Committee it is very difficult for Planning Committee to vary any plans or conditions, and if such conditions were altered, this could also be expensive for the developer to implement such changes. In this context, the importance of **early involvement** and comment in planning applications was emphasised to ensure that any planning concerns are incorporated into plans at the outset.

20.21 Understanding that this Planning Committee is a quasi-judicial process and that there are specific grounds on which planning applications can be challenged, officers also have to be mindful of not putting the Council in a position in which it can be legally challenged, which may expose the council to financial risks and losses.

20.22 The panel noted that the Planning Service were trying to get the community involved further forward in the planning process and this is embodied in the new Local Plan which is due to be considered at Cabinet. This creates a Development Charter which stipulates 5 essential tests for new development:

- Relate positively to neighbouring structures, new or old, to create a harmonious whole;
- Make a positive contribution to a place, improving the character and quality of an area;
- Confidently addresses feedback from local consultation;
- Demonstrate how the quality of the development will be secured when it is built; and
- Are inclusive and incorporate sustainable design and construction principles.

20.23 Of particular importance is provision 3, 'confidently addresses feedback from local consultation' which stresses the need that developers should identify what action they have taken as a result of community engagement. The updated Statement of Community Involvement also restates the importance of pre-application consultation. The Planning Service is trying to embed the community's voice in the planning process and to introduce tests for the developer to ensure that this takes place.

20.24 The panel also noted that a high calibre design panel has been appointed, with an independent chair. Different planning disciplines also sit on this panel which incorporates a range of interests and where individually representatives have a lot of experience in the industry. A majority of applications are brought before this panel for comment and input to help improve schemes before they go to Planning Committee.

20.25 The AD for Planning noted the concerns of the panel and said that these would be reported back to the service.

Resident Question

20.26 Under agreed procedure rules a local resident was allowed to set a question to the Cabinet member. The question is as set out below:

I believe strongly that planning policy should favour the siting of businesses - especially small businesses - in places near where their employees can live. This is good for people's quality of life (by reducing commuting time), for their health (because they are likely to walk or cycle to work) and for the environment (by reducing emissions due to motorised transport, whether public or private).

At the moment, planning policy favours the exact opposite, seeking to site businesses in large dedicated developments, which are often a long way away from where people work. The only businesses that are expected to be sited near homes are shops and schools, as opposed to manufacturers or service industries which sell nationwide or worldwide).

In my opinion, London in general and Haringey in particular should reverse a century of "zoning" policy in favour of mixing business and residential development.

The proposed destruction of the Courtyard at Lynton Road and its replacement by a purely residential development is exactly the sort of thing we should NOT be doing.

20.27 The panel noted that as part of the Mayoral Plan, the Council has to create over 15,200 new homes, 22,500 new jobs and 35 hectares of employment space, so in this context the Council is wishing to retain employment land where it can. The panel noted that it wanted to protect employment land and has a number of policies in place and in progress to support this. Mixed land usage is a way forward to help maintain employment space as the creation of large industrial areas is not practical. The panel noted that there was no intention of removing the employment status of the area in question.

20.28 Local plans to help improve balance between employment and housing space locally face significant national 'headwinds'. The government has already made it a permitted development to convert office space to housing, following earlier decisions to allow the conversion of storage and warehouse sites for housing. To counteract this, a report has gone to Cabinet to seek an Article 4 Direction to restrict warehouse conversions. From an economic viability perspective, the panel also noted that the potential revenues from the creation of small business space would not be sufficient to support such development alone, and that some other form of cross-subsidy with housing development should be considered (possibly by increasing the intensity of development).

20.29 In respect of the Lynton Road site the expectation the panel noted that it will be redeveloped but with additional employment floor space at an affordable level, cross subsidised by residential development. This does pose issues around build density and the impact that this will have on the amenity of to existing residents and businesses (e.g. parking). The panel noted that these were difficult challenges though there were limited opportunities to develop dedicated new employment space.

20.30 The panel recognised however, that national and regional policy drivers which promote housing development should not be underestimated as there have been considerable pressures to convert local employment space to residential (e.g. office to residential now a permitted development). This is recognised in the Local Plan so when new plans are submitted to develop employment land, these are encouraged to continue to provide for employment space alongside any new housing development. If this is not possible, then financial compensation is paid by the developer to support the creation of other employment facilities elsewhere.

20.31 It was noted that as local neighbourhood plans develop, these may provide some additional protection for local business spaces alongside other local features which determine the character of that area. This could be a further option for Lynton Road once the Crouch End Neighbourhood Plan is agreed.

20.32 In response, the local resident indicated that the mixed usage approach to Lynton Road site was welcomed.

Agreed: That the Assistant Director for Planning would provide further details of plans for the Lynton Road site, including any alterations since the publication of the Site Allocation Strategy.

21. HOMELESSNESS

21.1 As part of its work programme for 2015/16, the panel at its last meeting agreed that it would visit Apex House. The Chair reported back on the panels visit which was in two parts:

- Customer Service Centre – to understand how clients with housing needs initially present with the Council;
- Housing Options Team – to assess how housing needs are assessed and processed and what programmes the council has in place to prevent homelessness.

21.2 The panel noted the volume of client contacts received at Apex House Customer Service Centre (SCS) was approximately 300 per day of which a substantial proportion were housing related enquiries. The panel noted that despite preventative efforts of the Council, many people continued to present as homeless at the CSC.

21.3 The panel noted that the visit was particularly useful as this helped members to further understand the pressures within the housing allocations system and the impact that this has on temporary accommodation. From this visit, the panel noted that Haringey was supporting over 3,000 households in temporary accommodation and that within a newly configured Housing Register, there were over 7,500 waiting to be homed. Given the shortage of housing supply, it was recorded that the average waiting times for a two bed property, even for those in priority need could be up to three years. The panel noted that such information would be helpful in managing local housing expectations.

21.4 The manager of Housing Demand attended the panel and presented a short paper (attached) and to respond to member questions. The panel noted the recently

enacted changes to the Housing Register (HR), which now provides a more realistic presentation of those likely to find homes through the Council. The removal of bands D and E from the HR was justified as no households had been homed given the relative priority of those in bands A, B and C and the shortage of supply.

21.5 The panel also noted that there was a falling number of housing lets each year which demonstrated the limited capacity of the council to re-home people. For example:

- In 2011/12, there were 1,103 lets;
- In 2013/14 there were 848 lets;
- In 2014/15 there were 697 lets.

21.6 The panel noted however that the prospect of homing those applicants in band C within the new housing register was still very low given the scale of local housing need and shortage of supply. The panel noted that housing legislation requires that the Council gives 'reasonable preference' to a wide range of people which must be recognised in housing allocations register, even if their needs or the prospect of them being re-homed is limited. Bands D and E in the previous allocation register were those already in housing but who wanted a different type of housing, and were typically those in the private rented sector but who wanted a council house.

21.7 Members of the panel noted the period of time that people are likely to be in temporary accommodation had risen and were encouraged that accommodation standards in this sector risen, particularly in the reduction of using Bed and breakfast accommodation. The panel were keen to ensure that these trends continued and that standards should be continued to be monitored closely.

21.8 The Panel recognised the difficulties that front line staff face in this work in seeking to meet local housing needs and wanted to extend their thanks to those working in both these teams.

Agreed: To write to Customer Service Team and Housing Options Team to thank them for supporting the panels visit.

22. HARINGEY HOUSING STRATEGY (2015-2018)

22.1 The Lead Commissioner for Housing attended to brief the panel on the Haringey Housing Strategy (presentation attached). It was noted that this related to corporate priority five in the council and sets out the principles and objectives that will help to achieve this priority. It was also noted that this was a partnership strategy, also setting out the role of partners in meeting the set objectives.

22.2 An initial consultation was undertaken in 2014 on the key principles that would underpin housing strategy and this has informed the development of the Haringey Housing Strategy. There were over 300 responses to this initial consultation, and subsequent analysis of consultation responses demonstrated strong support for the proposed principles. Analysis also revealed three other themes:

- Achievability - whether the council can practically deliver on all the desired objectives;

- Accepting that people and communities are important within the strategy, 'bricks and mortar' for building new homes was of paramount importance;
- Affordability and the quality of the PRS was also important.

22.3 In response, the Haringey Housing Strategy has a number of themes:

- helping to deliver more targeted services for those most in housing need;
- prevention of homelessness;
- improving quality of housing in particular the private rented sector;
- ensuring the increasing supply of new homes and that there is a social dividend to development.

22.4 It was reported to the panel that there have been a number of substantive legislative and policy changes since the publication of the Housing Strategy which will influence the final shape of this document and the deliverability of objectives. Key issues highlighted were:

- recent budget announcements to reduce social rents which will restrict headroom within Housing Revenue Account and which will ultimately impact on the number of houses the council is able to build itself;
- the introduction of Housing & Planning Bill which among other things, extends right to buy (RTB) among housing associations and forces the sale of high value council homes.

22.5 It was noted that there was a significant housing affordability issue in Haringey, an issue which is similarly experienced by residents in many other London boroughs. Buying a property remains out of reach for many local residents given that the average house price in the borough is in excess of £500k which would require a significant deposit and income to finance. As average income in the borough is about £40k, buying a property is prohibitive for many residents.

22.6 The RTB will continue to be challenging as the council continues to lose local stock through this heavily discounted purchase scheme. In addition, the loss of high value properties over a certain threshold could severely impact on the availability of social housing in some areas of the borough. The threshold is yet to be fully determined, but initial estimates suggest that this could lead to the forced sale of up to 50 properties per year. The panel were concerned that these proposals could exacerbate inequalities between the east and the west of the borough. This could be of particular problem in specific wards where there are lots of street properties (e.g. Muswell Hill). How the forced sale will work in practice is yet to be determined as separate guidance is expected to be published soon, however what is known so far can be summarised as thus:

- once identified properties become vacant, these must remain vacant;
- this will result in loss of rental income;
- receipts are not maintained locally, though pooled regionally.

22.7 Provisions in the Welfare Bill indicate that there will be a reduction in social rents of 1% per year until 2010, in part to help reduce Housing Benefit costs. It is estimated that this will result in a loss of £15m per annum to the HRA, which will inhibit the council's ability to build new homes.

22.8 The panel discussed affordable rents, and in particular the definition of what this actually meant in monetary terms. It was noted that by definition, affordable could be up to 80% of the local market rent. In Haringey, social housing is let at approximately 37/38% of market rent, though this will reduce with coming legislation.

22.9 The panel discussed RTB of housing association properties in further detail, where it was noted that the National Federation of Housing Associations has brokered a voluntary agreement. With this agreement there will be no need for primary legislation to enact RTB proposals, so this will proceed, with certain safeguards (e.g. protecting housing in rural areas).

22.10 The panel discussed the provision of lifetime tenancies and whether it was now a more realistic proposition to offer more short-hold tenancies (1-5 years). The panel noted that the current policy (of providing lifetime tenancies) was considered by members at the adoption of the current tenancy strategy which expires in 2016 and will be subject to review at that point. The panel agreed that the new strategy should come to scrutiny before decision.

Agreed: That the new Tenancy Strategy should be presented to scrutiny before final decision.

22.11 The panel noted that formal consultation for the strategy closed on 18th October and that the emerging findings from this consultation would be presented at the next meeting as per work programme. This will provide the panel with an opportunity to comment on these ahead of an expected final decision at Cabinet in January 2016.

23. HOMES FOR HARINGEY

23.1 The panel noted the outcome of the Future of Housing Working Group which recommended that Homes for Haringey should be retained and that a new 10 year contract should be awarded and this was agreed by Cabinet in September 2015. The new management agreement will need to be worked up and brought back to Cabinet before March 2016.

23.2 Following this decision, Homes for Haringey will continue with those services which were transferred over last year (homelessness, allocation and lettings). There will be a two way Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE) process for:

- 200 staff from the Council's Community Housing Service who are currently seconded with Homes for Haringey;
- Homes for Haringey (Finance, Human Resources and IT) staff who will move back to the Council within the shared service centre.

23.3 It was noted that there would be three priorities for Homes for Haringey going forward these were:

- Continued negotiation of the new 10 year contract;
- Managing the two way TUPE staffing transfer;
- Defining and agreeing performance framework (standards, KPI) for Homes for Haringey.

23.4 The panel noted that in addition to recommending a new contract for Homes for Haringey, the Future of Housing Steering Group also suggested that new requirements are placed with Home fro Haringey in respect of:

- Resident involvement;
- Review of services to leaseholders;
- Review repairs service to encourage more residents to undertake minor repairs themselves;
- Initiate consultation with residents in Broadwater Farm before end of 2015.

23.5 The Future Housing Group also recommended that the Council consider the future of the Noel Park estate and develop a self funding proposal to support improvement works. It was noted that existing Decent Homes improvement will require £35million of which £11m has been sourced. Therefore £24million needs to be raised possibly through part-sale and mixed tenure options.

24. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

24.1 The panel noted that in addition to the work programme outline, there were two topics which had been agreed:

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL);
- Housing Viability Assessments.

24.2 Whilst the scope for the CIL had been developed and agreed, recent policy pronouncements in respect of Viability Assessments (using planning obligations to create Starter Homes for purchase at discount over affordable rent) meant that this scope was being reassessed.

24.3 The panel also noted that it was trying a different ‘scrutiny in day’ approach to project work, so that all the evidence was collected on one day to promote coherence and consistency in way evidence is collected. A date was being sought for the CIL project and panel members would be consulted.

24.4 The cabinet member indicated that the apportionment of the CIL receipts was important to ensure that maximum community benefit could be attained. The Cabinet member requested to be notified when the meeting was due to take place and would attend.

25. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS N/A

26. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The meeting ended at **9.10PM**

CHAIR: Councillor Eugene Ayisi

Signed by Chair Date

