

MINUTES OF MEETING Overview and Scrutiny Committee HELD ON Thursday, 13th October, 2022, 7.00 - 9.30 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: John Bevan (Chair), Pippa Connor (Vice-Chair) and Matt White

ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: Cllr Makbule Gunes, Yvonne Denny

12. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to item one on the agenda in respect of filming at the meeting and Members noted the information contained therein.

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Anita Jakhu, Kanupriya Jhunjunwala and Lourdes Kever.

14. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

16. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 25th July were agreed as a correct record.

18. MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL MEETINGS

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the following Scrutiny Panels were noted and any recommendations contained within them were approved:

- Adults and Health Scrutiny Panel – 21 July 2022
- Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel – 4 July 2022
- Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel – 30 June 2022
- Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel – 28 June 2022

19. UPDATE ON THE RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO FIRE SAFETY

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved recommendations on Fire Safety in High Rise blocks at its meeting on 25 March 2019 and Cabinet provided a response at its meeting on 9 July 2019. A further update was provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5th October 2020. The Committee received a report which provided a further update on these recommendations. The report was introduced by Judith Page, Assistant Director of Housing Property Services. The Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning was also present for this item. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Committee sought reassurances about residents being able to report problems and the fact that the link on the Council’s website did not seem to work properly. Members noted that one of the main learning points from Grenfell was around residents being able to report concerns. The Committee questioned whether the Council had made it easy to report problems and how this was monitored. In response, officers acknowledged that there was a degree of development required within the IT processes. It was suggested that there had likely been some teething problems as different systems had been transferred over from HfH to the Council. Officers agreed to work with the relevant admin team to ensure that an email inbox was in place for residents to report issues. Members requested that reporting mechanisms also be advertised on the Council’s website. **(Action: Judith Page).**
- b. Officers advised that, as part of the relevant legislation, the pilot building safety case was being developed in Kenneth Rollins House and this pilot would be used for the development of building safety cases for other housing blocks. The Council was also required to develop a resident engagement plan for each block. In addition, the Council had approved funding for the recruitment of five building safety managers who would be responsible for specific high rise blocks. Officers acknowledged that this had not progressed as quickly as they would have liked, but to some extent this had been down to HfH coming back in house and the challenges faced from switching over. Officers advised that they were developing pipelines for residents to report issues and that site visits and walkabouts of estates were ongoing.
- c. In response to a follow-up question on timescales, officers advised that all high rise safety blocks under qualifying categories would need a building safety case in place by September 2023. The pilot in KR House would be completed in November. The Committee requested that officers come back to the Committee with a follow-up report on how the consultation pilot went and how this was being programmed into ensure that residents were able to report problems the wider programme of developing building safety cases. **(Action: Judith Page).**
- d. Members sought an update on the programme of intrusive fire risk assessments. In response, officers advised that they had reported these to elsewhere and that they could provide this to the Committee. The Committee requested that officers

come back to the Committee with a full report on intrusive fire risk assessments along with an update in the pilot building safety case and any interim findings from the pilot, for the Committee's next meeting on 28th November. **(Action: Judith Page).**

- e. Concerns were raised about the ongoing failure to install a fire escape down from the communal walkway (onto Culvert Road) at Edgecot road. It was commented that a number of fire safety assessment had recommended the need for a fire escape but that this had not been carried out. Officers agreed to contact the Fire Safety team and get an update on the fire risk assessment for Edgecot Road and bring this back to the November meeting of OSC. **(Action: Judith Page).**
- f. The Committee sought assurances around care home provision and fire safety assessments. The Committee queried how the Council received assurances and monitored areas of concern in care homes, given that they were held by providers and reviewed by the Safeguarding Board. In response, officers noted that the CQC had strict monitoring processes in place, but that they would seek a written response from colleagues in Adults commissioning for the Committee. **(Action: Judith Page).**

RESOLVED

That the report was noted

20. CABINET MEMBER QUESTIONS - CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING SERVICES, PRIVATE RENTERS AND PLANNING

The Committee undertook a verbal question and answer session with Cllr Carlin, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning. The following arose as part of the discussion:

- a. The Committee questioned what the Council was doing to prosecute rogue landlords. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the introduction of the additional licensing scheme would mean that the Council would be actively going into tenanted properties and carrying out inspections, rather than relying on tenants to make complaints. The Cabinet Member advised that in terms of process, once an enforcement notice was issued, the landlord would have a specific amount of time to comply with that notice or the Council would then prosecute. The Cabinet Member highlighted the importance of proposed legislative changes to ban no-fault evictions.
- b. The Committee highlighted that it had previously requested that ward councillors be given access to fire safety risk assessments. It was noted that some of the smaller blocks did not have a risk assessment and the Committee sought clarification as to whether these blocks should have a risk assessment carried out. In response, officers agreed that they would undertake a manual exercise to check this and then come back to the Committee with a response. **(Action: Judith Page).**
- c. The Committee raised concerns about a lack of responses to residents when repairs were reported and suggested that, either housing manger posts were vacant following HfH coming in-house, or that residents did not know how to contact their housing managers. In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that each block should have a named housing manager and that she was happy to follow up with officers on the concerns raised. Yvonne

agreed to email Cllr Bevan with the specifics **(Action: Yvonne Denny)**. Cllr Carlin agreed to chase up the names of housing managers for each block. **(Action: Cllr Carlin)**.

- d. The Committee sought clarification about what support the Council offered to those who had been evicted, specifically in terms of the earlier point made around ending no-fault evictions. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that if tenants were evicted against their wishes, then there was specific legal process involved which would require a court order to be obtained. In most cases, residents could contact the Council's housing needs team, The Cabinet Member advised that if it was a family, the Council could help to pay some of its rent arrears and that in the past the Council had been able to help families secure a tenancy elsewhere in the private sector. If someone was unlawfully evicted, then this would be an enforcement issue and the Council would look to put people in contact with organisations who could support them to take legal action. In relation to single adults, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that the help on offer was limited due to a shortage of temporary accommodation places and the fact that the private rents were very expensive.
- e. The Committee sought an update about where the Council had got to with the programme to improve the standards of properties on estates from several years ago. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that the Decent Homes programme was originally based around providing new doors and windows. Since then the Council had agreed to widen the scope of these repairs to include communal spaces. The Cabinet Member advised that she was pushing for this to be called stock renewal to reflect these changes. The Council was currently going out with a big ten-year contract to undertake these works in order to take advantage of the economies of scale. Officers advised that the Council had delivered £35m of improvements last year, £45m improvements this year and that the target was to bring 100% of Council housing stock up to decent homes standards by 2025.
- f. The Chair requested an update on the revamping of the repairs scheme. In response, officers advised that this had been partially delayed due to TUPE of staff over from HfH. Officers advised that they were also bringing in resources within certain priority areas on a temporary basis, such as disrepair, until the permeant changes were made.
- g. In response to a question about the capacity of the repairs service, given the amount of new housing that was being built, officers advised that they were bringing in new operatives due to issues with the supply chain and that they were looking at direct delivery where feasible. Officers acknowledged had been some delays with resources as HfH was moved back in-house, however the service was currently recruiting at pace to fill key positions. In terms of resources, officers set out that the financial resources were there to ensure capacity within the repairs service. However, it was highlighted that there was a sector wide issue with this due to contractor supply chains. Work was underway to bring apprentices through.
- h. In response to a question about the holistic approach to stock renewal, officers advised that that 50% of stock surveys had been completed, which was the first time this exercise had been undertaken since 2015. Officers set out that a lot of work was being done on the holistic approach such as undertaking energy works, whilst undertaking repairs. Officers advised that they were confident that adopting a holistic approach was the best way to ensure value for money.

- Officers advised the Committee that they had modelled the impact of a rent cap on the HRA and that they were confident this would not unduly impact stock renewal.
- i. The Committee requested an update in relation to recruiting apprentices as part of the house building programme. In response, officers advised that three apprentices had just started, with a further plastering apprentice due to start in January when the relevant CONEL course began. All of these were local people. There were an additional four apprentices already in the existing programme and the Council had offered upskilling opportunities to existing staff, of which two individuals were taken on. The Cabinet Member also identified that all major works contracts in the future would insist on the use of apprentices when the spend was above a particular financial threshold
 - j. The Committee raised particular concerns about how effectively the Council communicated with its residents around repairs. In response, officers acknowledged these concerns and highlighted that there was a repairs improvement project in place to look at how this could be improved. Officers advised that the schedulers who book repairs had been brought back into the office as a way to drive improvements. It was also noted that the service was looking at whether the existing systems being used were being used in the most effective way. The Committee requested a further update around communication of repairs to a future meeting. **(Clerk)**.
 - k. In response to a request for clarification about what was involved with holistic approach to improving housing stock, officers advised that this involved undertaking insulation works along with energy improvements that were required to achieve an EPC rating of 'B' for all stock. This was combined with also ensuring that when major works were carried out on a block, then smaller jobs would be done at the same time, such as painting the railings. The idea was that disruption to residents would be minimised. Officers also highlighted that they were looking to undertake a pilot for the retrofitting of air source heat pumps as part of this holistic approach.

RESOLVED

Noted

21. 2021-22 PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN

The Committee received the 2021-22 Provisional Financial Outturn report, as presented to Cabinet on 19 July 2022. This set out the provisional outturn for 2021/22 for the General Fund, HRA, DSG and the Capital Programme compared to budget. It provided explanations of significant under/overspends and also included proposed transfers to/from reserves, revenue and capital carry forward requests, as well as details of any budget virements or adjustments. The report was introduced by Toyin Bamidele, Assistant Director of Finance as set out in the agenda pack at pages 91-130. The following arose during the discussion of the report:

- a. The Committee sought assurances around the £16m budget pressures within Adults and Children's. Whilst acknowledging that these had been mitigated at year end, the Committee queried whether these pressures would continue into future years and how this would be mitigated in future years. The Panel questioned whether future savings would be required? In response, officers

- advised that the key pressure in these services was around Covid and the complexity of care needs. Officers set out that the MTFs budget planning process was underway and that they would be working with directors and services to ensure the true costs were captured, along with an agreed way forward on how these could be mitigated.
- b. In relation to the Dedicated Support Grant, the Committee sought clarification around how the overspend was reduced from £6.7m down to £3.7m and whether this involved a reduction in services. In response, officers advised that this did not involve a reduction in services, instead it was mitigated through finding additional funding streams, such as grants. Officers agreed to provide a written response to this question. **(Action: Toyin Bamidele)**.
 - c. The Committee queried the slippage in demand mitigation projects within Adults and questioned whether this would require further savings to be made. In response, officers set out that Covid was the primary factor in the slippages, but that they were looking at this as part of the MTFs setting process. Officers confirmed alternative savings of the same value would need to be found for any undeliverable demand mitigation projects.
 - d. The Committee sought clarification around the reasons for a £3.6m realignment of Parking and Highways budgets (virement), as set out on page 129 of the pack. Officers agreed to come back with a written response. **(Action: Toyin Bamidele)**.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- I. Noted that the figures in the 2021-22 Provisional Financial Outturn remain provisional until the conclusion of the statutory audit process which has been extended due to the C19 pandemic and other challenges faced by our external auditors mainly due to the impact of government delays in enacting legislation to restructure the NHS.
- II. Noted that the C19 financial impact on the 2021-22 General Fund was offset by Government support.
- III. Noted that non-C19 related pressures forecast during the year were mitigated by year end.
- IV. Noted that statutory comments are included in the original report to Cabinet.

22. 2022/23 FINANCE UPDATE QUARTER 1

The Committee received the 2022-23 Quarter One Finance Update report, as presented to Cabinet on 13 September 2022. This report set out the forecast financial position for the Council as at Quarter one. It focused on the significant budget variances including those arising as a result of the forecast non-achievement of approved MTFs savings and the impact on the Council's agreed financial plans. The report underlines the impact that the wider economic conditions have had on the agreed budget. This was a key factor in the forecast overspend of £15.7m at Quarter One. The report was introduced by Toyin Bamidele, Assistant Director of Finance as

set out in the agenda pack at pages 91-130. The following arose during the discussion of the report: The following arose during the discussion on this item:

- a. The Committee requested clarification about the overall forecasted overspend at Q1 and whether the report was saying that there were £10.1m of savings that could not be mitigated. In response, officers advised that not all of the undeliverable savings would require new savings, some would be slipped to future years but some would require alternative savings to be found. Finance officers were working with the services to maximise opportunities and to minimise risks. Officers were going through savings line by line to see if they were deliverable and to identify alternative savings if required. The Committee was advised that a future challenge would likely be around mooted spending cuts by central government.
- b. In response to a question around the Capital budget and £650k being removed from the libraries budget, officers agreed to come back with a written response on whether this would impact the existing library refurbishments programme. **(Action: Toyin).**
- c. Officers agreed to provide a written briefing around the safety valve programme. **(Action: Toyin).**
- d. The Committee questioned whether, in light of a forecast overspend of £1.2m in Housing Demand Temporary Accommodation, whether additional funding was being sought for this service. In response, officers advised that this would be looked at as part of the MTFS process. Officers set out that some additional funding may be required but that it would also be necessary to examine whether the service could be made more efficient.

RESOLVED

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- I. Noted the financial forecasts provided at Quarter One and the assumptions surrounding them.
- II. Noted that Directors were seeking mitigating actions to bring down the current forecast overspends.
- III. Noted that statutory comments are included in the original report to Cabinet.

23. UPDATE ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FAIRNESS COMMISSION

24. WORK PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a draft work plan for the OSC and the four scrutiny panels, along with the feedback from the Scrutiny Café event in September.

The Committee also received a tabled draft scoping document for its scrutiny review on violence against women and girls. Officers advised that the Chair and Vice-Chair had met with the Director of Public Health to agree how to take the review forwards and that it would focus on schools based provision and community based provision. The review would also be seeking to hear from relevant VCS organisations in Haringey.

The Chair of the Housing Panel put forward a motion, that the name of the Panel should be changed to the Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel to reflect the current service structure and Council's changed priorities around Placemaking over regeneration. The motion was seconded by the Chair of the Adults Panel.

RESOLVED

- I. That the draft work plans for OSC and the four scrutiny panels were agreed.
- II. That the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel's name be changed to Housing, Planning and Development, with immediate effect.

25. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

26. FUTURE MEETINGS

- 28th November 2022
- 12th January 2023 (Your Council – budget proposals)
- 19th January 2023 (budget scrutiny)
- 30th March 2023

CHAIR: Councillor John Bevan

Signed by Chair

Date