

MINUTES OF THE MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Thursday, 26th September, 2024, 6.35 pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Alexandra Worrell (Chair), Tammy Hymas, Dawn Barnes, John Bevan and Isodoris Diakides

ALSO ATTENDING:

182. 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'.

183. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Moyeed. Cllr Williams also gave apologies.

Cllr Diakides have apologies for lateness.

Officers advised that Cllr Gordon was unwell.

184. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no items of urgent business.

185. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

186. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None.

187. MINUTES

The Panel requested an update on the outstanding action regarding Brewery Lane. Philip to chase **(Action)**.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 30th July were accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

188. HOUSING STRATEGY AND POLICIES PROGRAMME

The Panel received a report which set out the upcoming housing strategy and policy programme as an overview of the key policy and strategy documents being developed across Housing. The report was introduced by Hannah Adler, Head of Housing Strategy and Policy as set out in pages 17 to 24 of the agenda pack. The Assistant Director for Housing, Robbie Erbmänn was also present for this item, along with Darren Fairclough, Head of Rehousing. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel queried the extent to which the TA Discharge of Duty policy would take into account the suitability of that offer, particularly in the private rented sector, given the implications of someone making themselves intentionally homeless if they refused that offer. In response, officers acknowledged that the policy would set out what a suitable offer would look like when discharging someone into private rented accommodation. Officers also set out that there was statutory guidance around suitability of the property and also an appeals process.
- b. A member of the Panel raised concerns about rough sleepers around Tottenham Hale and the impression this have of the borough given that it was the main gateway into Tottenham. In response, officers advised that there was an updated rough sleeping strategy agreed last year. Officers agreed to get an update from the Rough Sleeping team on what action was being taken around the prevalence of rough sleepers and tents in Tottenham Hale and whether there was an officer in regular engagement with those individuals. **(Action: Philip).**
- c. The Panel sought assurances about the types of incentives being offered to people who held secure tenancies, to downsize their properties. It was suggested that the Council needed to offer people a personal mentor to navigate the process and provide tailored support. In response, officers advised that they were looking at the Rightsizing policy and that this would contain a range of incentives, that were broader than just offering them money. Officers advised that they were currently undertaking engagement work with some residents around this. As a follow-up the Panel suggested that the current incentives had been in place for some time and were clearly not incentive enough people to move homes. Officers acknowledged that the incentives were out of date and that there was a need to get a policy in place that set out what the revised offer was. This was being progressed by the team.
- d. The Panel questioned when the last time that the housing register was reviewed. It was suggested that the Council should write to everyone on the register to find about their circumstances and ascertain if they still needed to be on the register. In response, officers advised that it had been a while since the last time that this task had been undertaken, largely due to capacity. It was suggested that the best time to do this would be in conjunction with the development of a new allocations policy. The Panel commented that they would like to make a formal recommendation to Cabinet, that when the review of the Housing Register was carried out that this should not be done as a solely

- online engagement exercise and that conducting face-to-face sessions in libraries should also be part of the process. **(Action).**
- e. In response to a question, officers advised that they had been looking at what rightsizing incentives other boroughs had been offering to tenants.
 - f. The Panel sought assurances about the extent to which the condition of houses being offered to those who wished to rightsized was considered, officers replied that anyone under-occupying was automatically put into Band-A and that should theoretically give them more choice, but it was acknowledged that with the housing shortage it wouldn't necessarily work out that way. Officers acknowledged the need to take account of the state of the property being offered and having someone to support them through the process.
 - g. The Panel sought assurances about split tenancies, for example when a family had adult children. Officers advised that this was something that was being looked at from a policy perspective.
 - h. The Panel questioned the extent to which the Housing building target (1592) would be affected by NPPF changes announced by the new government. In response, officers advised that there were no immediate changes to the housing target as the new announcement related to a consultation on changing the National Planning Policy Framework. Any changes to housing targets would have to be reflected in a revised London Plan.
 - i. In relation to a question about the expectation that the current target would be met, officers advised that the number of completions in recent years was: 2021/22 – 1503; 2022/23 – 911; 2024/25 – 1189. It was expected that the number of completions in the current year would be supplemented by 500 new council homes. Officers acknowledged that without changes to the regulatory environment, such as grey build sites, meeting an increased housing target would be challenging.
 - j. In response to a question, officers gave assurances that the Planning Service was performing well and that this wasn't the cause of a bottleneck. The major factor was around market factors and problems with the economy more generally.
 - k. The Panel queried whether the authority was looking at introducing special design codes to supplement the local plan. In response, officers advised that that there was one in place in South Tottenham relating to upward housing extensions, but that there was no immediate plans to introduce other SDCs. The service's focus was on updating the Local Plan.
- *Clerk's note - 19:00 hrs – Cllr Diakides joined the meeting at this point**
- l. The Panel queried what support was offered to people who wanted to move out-of-borough. In response, officers advised that this was something that was done in the borough through offering incentives. It was suggested that the key to success was having a flexible offer and being able to support the tenant through the different stages of the process. It was acknowledged that more could be done to promote this offer and the incentives. It was commented that there was a degree of overlap between these schemes and mutual exchanges but in general they were separate. In response to a follow-up, officers advised that there was a dedicated under-occupation officer who would assist with right-sizing moves. More general exchange queries would be supported by the relevant tenancy officer.

- m. The Chair queried the new allocations policy and asked for an outline of what some of the key trade-offs were likely to be. In response officers put forward the following areas:
- Meeting the housing needs of residents versus the high costs of housing some people.
 - Supporting existing social tenants versus those who are not existing social tenants who also need housing.
 - Supporting residents who have been on the housing register for a long time versus those with more pressing needs.
 - Immediate needs versus long-term needs
- n. Officers advised that there had been an exercise with dedicated focus groups with individuals on the housing register. Officers emphasised that the policy was still in draft stage at present. The Panel agreed to have an item on the Allocations policy at a future meeting, once there was a draft policy to scrutinise. **(Action: Philip)**.
- o. In response to a follow-up, officers set out that households in Temporary Accommodation and households in severe overcrowding would both be Band-B and their allocation would be determined by length of time of the housing register. Officers commented that there was also a discussion to be had around how to band families who are overcrowded in the private sector. Ultimately, the underlying problem was that there was not enough housing in the borough.
- p. The Panel questioned what the state of the Homelessness Service after it was brought back in-house. In response, officers advised that the service was only transferred over to the ALMO in 2015 and that prior to that Haringey was one of the leading London boroughs in this area. There were no particular issues with the Homelessness service when it was brought back in-house.
- q. The Panel related a couple of specific cases where an 8 person family was being housed in a 2 bedroom property and that in both cases these families were below Band-A. In response, officers acknowledged that this was an illustrative example of how big the problem was in Haringey. Cases of severe overcrowding, which was defined as being overcrowded by 2 or more bedrooms, were currently allocated as being Band-B. In addition to building more homes, the Council was also seeking to acquire more properties through the Haringey Community Benefit society in order to increase the housing supply.
- r. Officers set out that the average wait time for a Band-B family in 2022/23 was 10 years and 5 months and that this had increased in 2023/24 to 10 years and 10 months.
- s. In response to a questions around voids, officers set out that the HRA Business Plan set out an expectation that the expected void rate would be 1% or around 150 per year. It was noted that last year there was a higher level of voids than the service would have liked and so they increased it to 2%. Officers set out that they were expecting 200 new voids to come through the Neighbourhood Moves scheme in addition to the churn from general needs housing stock.
- t. The Panel enquired about the industrial action being taken by repairs staff and the extent to which there was a resolution on the horizon. In response, officers advised that the Council had made an offer to members of its Red Book scheme, but that offer had not been accepted. Internal discussions were ongoing but there was no progress to date. Officers emphasised the

- organisation's position as needing to be fair to all employees. In relation to a follow-up question, officers advised that ACAS had some limited involvement in the dispute to date. Officers also set out that there was no risk to the Council's GLA good work accreditation from the ongoing industrial dispute.
- u. Cllr Bevan commented that he would like to see all those on the housing register be written to, at the same time as the allocations policy was updated.
 - v. A Member of the Panel raised concerns about recent cases involving residents having their TA Travelodge bookings cancelled at no notice and being turned out on to the street. It was suggested that there was an issue with the Council maxing its credit facilities as well as problems with admin problems in processing these payments. In response, officers advised that use of Travelodges was very much a last resort due to their unsuitability for long-term stays. There were currently around a dozen households in Travelodges. Officers agreed to look into the specific case outside of the meeting if the Member sent them the details. It was agreed to get a written response from the AD for Housing Demand on the possible wider admin/credit issues. **(Action: Cllr Bevan).**
 - w. The Panel queried the extent to which the Council had discretion when it came to intermediate housing. In response, officers advised that the Council was in the process of drafting an intermediate housing policy, which set out maximum rent thresholds per household based funding levels. The levels were £60k for intermediate rent and £90k for shared ownership. Officers advised that planning policy on intermediate housing was set at the national and London level, through the NPPF and the London Plan. It was noted that both of these documents were due to be updated going forward and so there was an opportunity to influence planning policy in this area.
 - x. The Panel sought assurances that everything was being done to reduce the pressures on the housing register and that consideration was being given to how to improve the incentives to people to right-size. In response, officers advised that everything was being done that could be and that officers recognised the importance of increasing housing supply in the borough. The AD for Housing advised that his team were looking to double the number of acquisitions and were also exploring temporary modular housing units.

RESOLVED

That the report was noted.

189. HRA CAPITAL GOVERNANCE

The Panel received a presentation which provided an update around the governance and monitoring of the HRA capital budget and projects. The presentation was introduced by Christian Carlisle, Interim Assistant Director of Asset Management, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 25-32. The AD for Housing was also present for this agenda item. The following arose as part of the discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel sought more detail about how decisions were made about which capital projects to continue. In response, officers advised that in relation to refurbishment of existing properties, this was set through the Asset Management strategy, which set out how the Council plans and prioritises its investment based on the information it had available. It was commented that

stock data was looked at to help identify and plan where investments would be made, based on agreed set of priorities. Officers advised that the highest priority was given to Health and Safety works and those needed to meet regulatory requirements. In relation to new builds, the AD for Housing advised that the main financial metric was positive net present value. This looked at the cash flow value received from the housing, discounted by the borrowing costs used to build it. Other considerations were whether the scheme was net cash flow positive in the first year and value for money considerations based on a threshold for price per metres squared.

- b. The Panel sought further assurance about how the Council was able to balance financial limitations with the political decisions taken to build new Council homes and invest in its existing stock. In response, officers advised that there was framework in place, within which decisions were taken. Officers set out that schemes within the HDP were based on the metrics discussed above, notably net present value (NPV). Officers advised that the Housing Delivery Plan was important to the overall viability of the HRA, as it allowed the Council to grow its income. Similarly, money spent on investing in current stock reduced repair costs. Officers advised that they knew they had to build at pace and scale, and that a lot of time was spent looking at what pace the authority could afford to viably build at. Officers commented that the service had recently completed a stock condition survey, which showed a need for £1.2 billion investment, against an allocation of around £600m in funding. It was crucial, therefore, that the Council was able to prioritise how it spent this money. Officers gave firm assurances that they would always prioritise making sure that buildings were safe.
- c. The Panel sought assurances around progress with implementing a procurement framework. In response, officers advised that there had been some delays due to the fact that Council had decide to use the new London LCP framework instead. Contractors had been notified and the Council was due to go out to procurement in October on that basis.
- d. The Panel expressed a degree of scepticism with the £1.2B stock condition survey findings, suggesting that this seemed to be very high based on the average cost spread across the number of social housing units the Council owned. In response, officers advised that the costs for refurbishing whole blocks was expensive and that external works such as new roofs and lift replacements were more expensive that upgrading new bathrooms/kitchens, for example. The Panel emphasised the need to have an accurate figure for this as it would be used to determine refurbishment costs over a 20-30year period. Officers gave an example that the average block refurbishment costs were about £10-13M. Officers to provide a written update on how the figure of £1.2B was arrived at. **(Action: Christian Carlisle)**.
- e. The Chair requested that the budget scrutiny papers provided a detailed breakdown of the capital projects and a level of detail about which schemes were being reduced or re-profiled.
- f. The Panel sought clarification as to whether any consideration had been given to setting up an in-house company to undertake planned maintenance. In relation to planned investment works, officers advised that due to the specialist nature of the works and the range of trades needed without a steady stream of work for them to do, it was not a viable option. Officers advised that in relation

- to new build properties, the contractor margins were around 3-5% and that would mean that the Council would be taking on a lot of risk.
- g. Officers advised Members that they did promote the use of local supply chains in the borough in order to support local businesses and local apprenticeships.
 - h. In response to a question about social value being part of the procurement process, officers advised that it was done on the basis of 60% quality and 40% price. Of that 60%, 10% of the score was on its social value.

RESOLVED

That the presentation was noted.

190. PLACEMAKING PROGRAMMES AND FUNDING

The Panel received a report which provided an update on existing and planned placemaking programmes and, and details on place making funding streams. The report was introduced by Anna Blandford AD for Regeneration and Economic Development and as set out in the agenda pack at pages 33-46. The Panel also received a presentation which was included in the tabled papers additional agenda pack. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel sought assurances about building good relations with the community in Tottenham, particularly around Seven Sisters Market. In response, officers emphasised the Shaping Tottenham strategy, which had been developed in conjunction with the local community. There had also been a number of stakeholder panels set up for Tottenham Hale. The Council had recently completed the refurbishment of the Welbourne Centre and Down Lane Park which, it was hoped, had built a degree of trust that the Council was acting in the interests of local residents. In relation to Seven Sisters Market, it was acknowledged that there had been a lot of delays and that this had been frustrating to the market stall holders. The Council had been working with Places for London and hardship payments had been made to the stall holders. A new contractor for the site had been appointed and it was hoped it would reopen next year.
- b. The Panel commented on their frustrations with delays to the reopening of Seven Sisters Market and the fact that it was located at a key gateway to London. In response, officers acknowledged the Panel's frustrations with delays in opening a temporary market. It was commented that the Council had been active in lobbying TfL, but that the project had been impacted by TfL's difficult financial position.
- c. The Panel sought assurances around Bruce Grove railway arches and concerns that the company that bought the site had applied to the Council for funding to refurbish them. In response, officers advised that they looked into the possibility of getting heritage funding for the site but that there was not enough funding available to help with the project. Officers set out that the company that bought the site would have to undertake the project without financial support from the Council.
- d. The Panel raised concerns about recent reports in the media that Lendlease had walked away from the High Road West programme and the ongoing delays

- and costs involved in the scheme to date, particularly from flats being boarded up and the Council receiving no rent. In response, officers advised that Lendlease had publicly announced their intention to move out of Europe. It was stated that Lendlease was still the Council's development partner for High Road West and they were still under contract with the Council. Officers advised that they were unable to say much more about it at this stage. Officers advised that they were in discussion with other services within the council to see if some of the empty properties could be used to provide Temporary Accommodation.
- e. The Panel enquired whether it was anticipated that Lendlease would have to sell its UK arm wholesale or whether it might be done piecemeal. In response, officers reiterated that there was not much they could say, but that Lendlease had reaffirmed their commitment to the project during calls with the Council. Officers suggested that in the eventuality that the scheme did not proceed as planned there were a range of options available.
 - f. The Panel emphasised the need for seating and useable public realm infrastructure in designing town centres and that hostile architecture should be avoided where possible. In response, officers acknowledged this point and commented that public realm works should be friendly and accessible to all.

RESOLVED

That the update was noted.

191. RESPONSE TO OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT REFERENCE 23 016 137 (HARINGEY REFERENCE LBH/14192823) IN RELATION TO PLANNING APPLICATION HGY/2022/4537

The Panel received a report which fed back to the Panel on a response to an Ombudsman Complaint (Haringey Reference LBH/14192823) in relation to the determination of planning application HGY/2022/4537 in Crouch End Ward. One of the Ombudsman's recommendations in relation to the case was to "report the findings of this review to its relevant oversight and scrutiny committee". The report was introduced by Robbie McNaugher, Head of Development Management and Planning Enforcement, as set out in the agenda pack at pages 47-60. Rob Krzyszowski, Assistant Director, Planning, Building Standards & Sustainability was also present for this agenda item. The following arose in discussion of this item:

- a. The Panel sought assurances about the remedies that had been put in place following this case and the extent to which regular meetings were held in the team. The Panel also asked whether workload was an issue and did the team perhaps need to slow down in order to prevent errors. In response, officers advised that training sessions had been set up with staff following the case and that a team of barristers had been in to provide that training. In addition, regular meetings were held within the team and developments in case law were discussed at these meetings. In relation to speed, officers advised that the service handled around 3k applications in a year and that this was the only one

where an objection was missed completely. It was suggested that this was a very rare occurrence.

- b. In response to a question, officers advised that the original permission had expired, but that a resubmitted application had been approved and that there was a live permission in place for these works, but that they had not been undertaken as yet.
- c. In response to a question, officers advised that if an error had been made the usual practice would be to report that to the relevant team manager and that there were a number of processes in place to monitor and check the work of the team.
- d. Officers advised that there was a peer review undertaken in October 2023 and that the outcome of that was reported to Cabinet in March. The team were working through the action plan that arose from the review and this would be reported to Strategic Planning Committee. Officers also advised that there was also an internal audit of Planning underway.

RESOLVED

That the Scrutiny Panel noted the report.

192. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

193. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 5th November
- 21st November (Budget)
- 6th March

CHAIR: Councillor Alexandra Worrell

Signed by Chair

Date